# MANUSCRIPT CULTURES AND EPIGRAPHY IN THE TAI WORLD

Edited by

Volker Grabowsky

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# Introduction
# Manuscript Cultures and Epigraphy of the Tai World

During the last three to four decades, an impressive corpus of manuscripts and epigraphical material in Thailand, Laos, and adjacent Tai speaking areas has been surveyed, documented, and in recent years digitized. Interest in this material has not been restricted to philological and historical studies of the texts contained in manuscripts and inscriptions. It has also encompassed aspects that consider manuscripts (written on palm leaf, various forms of paper, cloth, bamboo, and other organic materials) and inscriptions (on stone, metal, wood) as culturally significant objects. Although manuscripts and inscriptions may be considered as things of the past in a modern world that is dominated by print and digital technologies, there are areas in the Tai world in which they are still produced. This book explores the production, use, and transmission of manuscripts as containers of traditional knowledge and as objects used in daily life, such as in rituals and ceremonies. Special emphasis is given to the relationship between manuscripts and inscriptions, which have mutually influenced each other to a large degree.

The volume starts with an investigation into the epigraphy of the Tai world. Under epigraphy, derived from the Classical Greek verb *epigraphein* ("to write upon," or "to incise") we generally understand the science of studying written matters recorded on hard or durable materials. Though "substractive" techniques, such as incisions with a chisel or burin, are considered typical for most inscriptions, they are also applied to palm-leaf manuscripts incised with a stylus. The differentiation between fixed epigraphs written on hard, inorganic material on the one hand and manuscripts as portable written objects made of organic material is also questionable, given the large number of less durable wooden inscriptions and Buddhist manuscripts written in black lacquer on copper sheets in *poṭhi* format. Silvio Panciera (2012, 8) argues that it is the unidirectional way of communication oriented toward a collectivity, and unlike a manuscript not addressed to specific persons or groups, which characterizes an inscription.

The Tai peoples form an ethno-linguistic group of more than 100 million people living in settlements that extend from the Malay Peninsula to southern China, and from northern Vietnam as far as Assam in northeast India. From their original base in southeastern China, the Tai peoples expanded between the 7th and 13th centuries in waves of migration to their present settlements, displacing or assimilating the indigenous Austroasiatic populations (Mon, Khmer, etc.). Two Tai languages, namely Central Thai (Siamese) and Lao, are the official languages of two modern nation states: the Kingdom of Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), comprising populations of 70 million and 7 million, respectively. Moreover, Lao is the native tongue for 4 million speakers in multi-ethnic Laos and for 15 to 20 million people in neighbouring Thailand. Various other Tai languages belonging to the southwestern branch of the Tai-Kadai language family are spoken across the regions: Tai Yuan, also called Kam Müang, in the upper north of Thailand; Shan and Tai Khün in the Shan State, Burma; and Tai Daeng, Tai Khao, and Tai Dam in northern Vietnam and northeastern Laos, including Tai-speaking communities in southwestern Yunnan, such as Tai Lü and Tai Nüa. Due to voluntary migrations and forced resettlements that have taken place over the centuries, all these Tai languages are also spoken in diaspora communities beyond their former core areas.

Through close contact with the older cultures of Mon and Khmer, the southwestern Tai developed their own writing system, as did the Thai (Siamese), the Lao, the Tai Yuan (Northern Thai), and the Shan (Tai Yai). While the earliest evidence of Tai epigraphy dates back to the 14th century, Thailand's oldest surviving palm-leaf manuscripts date from the second half of the 15th century.

During the 13th century, after generations of migration from southern China the first Tai-speaking polities emerged and gradually adapted the South Indian writing systems used by the indigenous Austroasiatic peoples in mainland Southeast Asia. The earliest scripts appropriated by the Mon and Khmer were based on a South Indian form of the Brahmi script, commonly called Pallava. To adopt the writing systems of Mon and Khmer, which are non-tonal, for the tonal Tai languages was a challenge. Such adaptation was first attested in the Sukhothai kingdom in upper-central Thailand during the late 13th century in the form of the controversial inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng dated 1292.[1] The form of the old Sukhothai letters and the orthography of this ancient script resemble Old Khmer. The new writing system, known as Sukhothai script, dispersed across neighbouring regions and later evolved into other distinctive scripts for writing various Tai vernaculars, such as the Tamarind Pod script (*tua aksòn fak kham*) of Lan Na and the Old Lao script (*tua aksòn lao buhan*)[2] of Lan Xang (now Laos and northeast Thailand). However, the Tai-speaking population of Sukhothai did not abandon the legacy of the Old Khmer script. Co-existing with vernacular appropriated Sukhothai script, a variation of the Old Khmer script was still employed in Sukhothai to write Pāli and bilingual Pāli-Thai texts. This later evolved into a script resembling the square-shaped variant of Khmer, commonly known as the Khòm script in Thailand.

Shortly after the earliest evidence of the Sukhothai script, another type of script, apparently an offshoot of the Old Mon script of Hariphunchai, appeared in the Lan Na kingdom during the second half of the 14th century or earlier. The script was employed in its early phase to notate

Buddhist texts in Pāli, so it became widely known as the Dhamma or Tham script. The first dated evidence of the Dhamma script for writing vernacular Tai texts is an inscription from 1465 on the pedestal of a Buddha image housed in Wat Chiang Man in Chiang Mai. The diffusion of the Dhamma script in the Upper Mekong region still lacks thorough study. Based on current knowledge, the script is assumed to have spread from Lan Na to Chiang Tung and Chiang Rung (Sipsòng Panna) no later than the mid-15th century (Apiradee 2003, 32). It ultimately reached Lan Xang, where it made its first documented appearance in 1520/21 (CS 882) in a monolingual Pāli palm-leaf manuscript kept at the Provincial Museum in Luang Prabang (formerly the Royal Palace). The oldest epigraphical evidence of the Dhamma script in Lan Xang is from an inscription in Luang Prabang, dated 1527 (Lorrillard 2018, 95). This was during the reign of King Phothisarat (1520–1547), when cultural and dynastic relations between Lan Na and Lan Xang became very close. Over the course of time, several regional variants of the Dhamma or Tham script developed, called Tham Lan Na (in Northern Thailand), Tham Lao (in Laos and Northeast Thailand), Tham Khün (in Chiang Tung), and Tham Lü (in Sipsòng Panna). This large geographical area is sometimes called the "Dhamma Script Cultural Domain".[3]

In Burmese, Mon, and Khmer manuscript cultures, one script is used to write all kinds of texts. However, biscriptality is a feature in most Tai manuscript cultures. This means that different scripts are used to write sacred and secular texts. Thus, non-religious Thai and religious Khòm scripts co-existed in central and southern Thailand well into the 20th century; the same was the case in Laos with regard to the parallel use of Lao Buhan and Tham Lao scripts. The Shan in eastern Myanmar use Burmese characters to write Pāli texts, while various Tai Nüa groups in Yunnan and beyond apply the secular Lik script along with the religious Tham script. The variety of scripts used makes manuscript and epigraphic cultures of the Tai world uniquely diverse, rich, and complex.

The study of Tai epigraphy has developed steadily over the last century based on early attempts to decipher ancient inscriptions during the late 19th century. This has resulted in a number of publications, such as the earliest collection of Sukhothai inscriptions edited by George Cœdès in 1924. A corpus of Tai inscriptions has been edited and published through the efforts of both indigenous and Western scholars. Epigraphical research is most advanced and evidence best documented in the Lan Na region of the Tai world. The Archive of Lan Na Inscriptions in Chiang Mai University's Social Research Institute has published a 15-volume *Corpus of Lan Na Inscriptions* (1997–2013), while Buchmann's catalogs and glossaries of Lan Na inscriptions (2011 and 2019) are invaluable tools for researchers to understand and translate inscriptions written in archaic Northern Thai. Although the editing of Sukhothai inscriptions has produced some impressive results in recent years, a large number of inscriptions remain to be published and investigated by scholars.

Many epigraphic publications in Thailand, at least since the early 20th century, have been dedicated to Sukhothai inscriptions. However, scholars did not have access to epigraphic collections of the Ayutthaya kingdom until 2018.[4] Inscriptions of the early Bangkok period, eventually determined to be from the late 18th century, have not yet been compiled into collections.[5] Undeniably, many Siamese inscriptions have been lost due to lack of publication, even if there are now more available Tai epigraphic publications that cover Siamese, Lan Na, Lao, and Tai Khün inscriptions. Notwithstanding these editions, aspects of literacy and literary cultures reflecting this epigraphic evidence have not been fully discussed. Questions regarding the functions and the readership of inscriptions, for example, have barely been investigated. Several contributions to this volume address this gap of knowledge.

Tai manuscripts, on the other hand, date from much later than early Tai inscriptions, because the recording medium is less durable. The earliest inscriptions of Sukhothai and Lan Na date from the late-13th and the 14th centuries; the earliest surviving Lan Na manuscript dates from the late 15th century and the earliest Siamese manuscript from the early 17th century.[6] Although early stone inscriptions mention manuscripts,[7] none have survived from earlier times because of the humid climate and damage by insects and other animals, which affect even the most durable organic writing materials, such as palm leaf. Furthermore, manuscripts are often considered to be copies of texts from older generations of manuscripts. Accordingly, unlike inscriptions they do not represent an original, so they have often been dismissed as not authentic. As a result, Tai manuscripts have been studied and explored less than epigraphy. Despite later evidence and questionable authenticity, manuscripts appear in various forms, ranging from palm-leaf bundles to leporello paper folded books, and have survived in much larger volumes than inscriptions. The texts in extant manuscripts vary from Buddhist scriptures to poetry, secular treatises, and official documents. Studying manuscripts can therefore provide new insights into history, culture, and literature. Many unknown texts have yet to be unraveled from manuscripts. Furthermore, paratextual elements of manuscripts, such as prefaces and colophons of scribes and sponsors, often become resources to study manuscript culture, offering valuable insights into how specific texts were used, transmitted, and circulated in the pre-modern period. Unfortunately, a very small proportion of existing Tai manuscripts have been edited and published compared to extant inscriptions, leaving Tai manuscript cultures in need of further investigation. In this volume, manuscripts are not primarily considered as a medium for texts, rather as unique artefacts that reveal often-overlooked aspects of traditional Tai writing culture.

Palm leaf is the most widely used and also, in the region's subtropical climate, the most durable "soft" writing material. In central and southern Thailand, palm-leaf manuscripts were used almost exclusively for Buddhist texts, which were usually written in Pāli, the sacred language of Theravada Buddhism. In contrast, the leporello[8] format was used for such secular texts as chronicles, legal texts, medical and astrological treatises, official documents, non-religious literary works, and on occasion Buddhist texts. A cardboard-like paper made from the bark of the *khòi* tree (*Streblus asper*)[9] was used for these manuscripts. Both sides of the grayish *khòi* paper were used, the text was written using either black ink, or yellowish ink or white chalk after the paper had been coated with lampblack. The covers of *samut khòi*, as leporello manuscripts are called, and palm-leaf manuscripts were often decorated with lacquer and gold and kept in elaborately fashioned wooden boxes.

Although palm leaves were the preferred material for traditional texts due to their durability in the humid climate of Southeast Asia, other writing materials were also used. A small, but not insignificant, number of northern Thai and Lao manuscripts are paper leporello manuscripts. Standard paper pulp is derived from the *sa* tree, a kind of paper mulberry tree (*Brousontetia papyrifera*). These folded books are colloquially called *pap sa* (*pap:* folded book; similar to the Siamese *samut khòi*). There are also bound books, notably in Tai Lü areas, with each piece of paper folded once vertically to give a portrait orientation. Folding the paper allows both sides of each sheet to be used for writing. The sheaves of paper are sewn together along one vertical side. This kind of manuscript is called *pap hua*. In the manuscript tradition of the Tai Lü and the Shan, *pap sa* manuscripts play a very important role and are even more widespread than palm-leaf manuscripts, which are restricted to religious texts. In contrast, less than one-tenth of Lan Na and Lao manuscripts are written on mulberry paper, though for certain genres — notably astrology, traditional medicine, and white magic — the proportion of *pap sa* manuscripts is between one-fifth and one-third of the total.

The digital technologies of the early 21st century allow modern scholars easier access to manuscripts and inscriptions than during the previous century. Digital reproductions of manuscripts and inscriptions contain higher resolution and color quality than microfilm technology. The power of digital technology has undeniably stimulated the so-called "return to philology" (Eisner 2011, 6–9; McGann 2013, 327) over the past few decades, in which modern scholars of history and culture have tended to turn away from the authoritative printed editions to their primary written sources: manuscripts and inscriptions. Furthermore, the power of social media has strengthened academic communities by connecting them across continents, allowing immediate circulation of information, including through primary written artefacts and photographs. Emerging technologies will ensure expansion of the fields of manuscript and epigraphic cultures.

Panels discussing these questions have been held at international academic conferences over the past few years. This edited volume, entitled *Manuscript Cultures and Epigraphy of the Tai World*, is based on papers presented in 2017 at the 13th International Conference on Thai Studies (ICTS13) at Chiang Mai University (Thailand) and the 33rd Deutscher Orientalistentag (DOT33) at Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (Germany). Although it is not a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted field of Tai manuscript cultures and epigraphy, it addresses innovative research questions that pertain to the reflection of modernity in the still-living manuscript cultures of the Tai world. Is there a shift in writing support (for example, from palm leaf to mulberry paper, and from mulberry to industrial paper) and in scripts (for example, from variants of the Tham script to modern Thai and Lao) due to the cultural and economic developments of the 20th and 21st centuries? If so, how do such shifts affect the transmission of traditional knowledge (local wisdom, folktales, ritual texts, etc.)? How do biscriptality (a feature of Tai manuscript cultures), diglossia, and multiglossia (the use of two or more dialects/languages) in one manuscript reflect a multi-ethnic environment, especially in the Upper Mekong and Salween Subregion?

Further research questions pertain to the preservation and storage of manuscripts. The different kinds of repositories, ranging from diverse local repositories (for instance, in northern Thailand and Yunnan) to large international collections in the Western world require investigation. Current relatively easy access to these bodies of texts allows a more comprehensive look at the chronological and synchronic development of literature of the Tai world. What new lessons can be learned? Can we assess with greater accuracy the weight and social importance of some literary productions?

This volume comprises three parts. Part I, "Scripts, Inscriptions, and Manuscripts," focuses on the diversity of Tai script cultures by exploring epigraphic corpora and their inscribing culture and by revisiting several features and subcultures that co-exist with the dominant script cultures. The first chapter, by French historian and epigrapher Michel Lorrillard, analyses epigraphical data from the kingdoms of Lan Na and Lan Xang by applying a new approach to cross-border history. His comparative study analyzes two inscription corpora, dated between the second half of the 15th century and the mid-16th century, found in two culturally and linguistically related polities of the Mekong river basin. The epigraphic corpora largely testify to relations between the two politico-cultural areas; their form and content display obvious and numerous borrowings, mostly from downstream regions of the Mekong. However, analysis of these two corpora also reveals important differences that prevent confusion, even if the geographical origin of the inscriptions is forgotten, whether on steles or on such other objects as Buddha images. Within present-day Laos, it is even possible to identify the areas where Lan Na culture was predominant. A comprehensive approach to the epigraphic sources of northern Thailand and Laos thus adds precious data to knowledge of the regional history of Tai ethnic groups.

François Lagirarde's paper focuses on the corpus of Lan Na or northern Thai inscriptions to discuss aspects of literacy and the role of inscriptions in the literate culture of Northern Thailand. Based on the available publications of the Lan Na epigraphic corpus, the chapter highlights the communicative functions of inscriptions, mainly on stone and bronze, in religious and legal contexts by locating stone inscriptions from the early literary history of Lan Na. Lagirarde proposes a set of references and information that enrich our knowledge of the literary dynamics at work in Greater Lan Na at the time of its magnificence. It examines several topics, such as the narrative of the travels of the Buddha, predictions concerning his relics (basic texts of which we have the "full" version), borrowings from canonical texts and other sources, and existing information on the life of texts and manuscripts.

Peera Panarut's chapter, "Decoding the hidden words: The encoded texts and paratexts in Siamese manuscript culture," demonstrates the tradition of codes and secret writings as a part of Siamese manuscript cultures by collecting encoded texts and paratexts from various literary manuscripts. Although mentioned in traditional treatises on orthography and poetics, the codes are not commonly found in actual manuscripts and are often overlooked by modern scholars. However, the chapter proves that codes were used in manuscripts at least up until the mid-19th century, even though the texts and paratexts decoded might not seem to connote any secrets.

Manasicha Akepiyapornchai and Peera Panarut's "Sacred literacy: An overview of multilingual Siamese Grantha manuscripts" explores one of the most restricted and mysterious subcultures in Siamese writing culture, namely Siamese Grantha manuscript culture. Adapted from South Indian Grantha, the Siamese Grantha script has been used by the Brahmanical priests of the Siamese royal court from the early Bangkok period to the present day. The corpus under study covers 17 extant Siamese Grantha manuscripts written in Thai, Sanskrit, and Tamil. It presents a unique phenomenon in which languages from three different linguistic families co-exist, revealing another forgotten part of the Siamese manuscript culture at the cultural crossroad between Brahmanism and the royal court culture of Thailand.

Part II, "Buddhist and Classical Literature," offers diverse perspectives and investigates relationships between texts and contexts through manuscripts of Buddhist texts and classical literature, two groups that constitute the body of many Tai manuscript cultures. Citing Buddhist manuscripts in actual monastic rituals, Silpsupa Jaengsawang's chapter studies manuscripts containing homiletic texts, called *Anisong* (literally "advantage" or "benefit"), that are widespread in the Tai world. The corpus of *Anisong Bun Phavet* manuscripts, explaining meritorious incentives gained by listening to or joining the chanting rituals of the *Vessantara Jātaka*, reveals the interaction between manuscripts, rituals, and audiences in the context of monastic rituals. Through textual, paratextual, and ritual analyses, Silpsupa demonstrates how Lao Buddhist *Anisong* manuscripts interplayed in actual ritual settings.

Bonnie Pacala Brereton's focuses on the Siamese corpus of *Phra Malai Klòn Suat*, the vernacular version of the story of the magical monk who travelled to Hell and Heaven. The miniature paintings in these manuscripts depict key scenes from the story, as well as pairs of seated monks, sometimes with legs crossed and a talipot fan (*talabat*) in their hands. Other images show monks in very unusual postures, with strange facial expressions. Concentrating on controversial illustrations of monks appearing in various *Phra Malai* manuscripts, the author argues that the illustrated monks are not simply "naughty monks" as Western scholars suggested, but reflect the chanting tradition in an actual context. The author's interpretation is based on the text of *Phra Malai Klòn Suat* itself, the function and usage of the text, and the roles of monks and lay chanters in monastic ceremonies.

In her chapter, entitled "A Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* from the late Ayutthaya era," Jana Igunma investigates a Siamese poetic tale that is related to the *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* (Golden Conch Birth Story). This is either known as *Sang Thòng* or *Sang Sinchai*, the latter being the popular title for the Lao version of the story, which was reportedly written down for the first time in Lao by Pangkham, a Lao writer/scribe thought to have lived in the 16th century. Igunma investigates the Siamese version of *Sang Sinchai* based on a manuscript fragment preserved at the British Library. According to the author, the writing, content, style, and accounts of the library's manuscript acquisition indicate that this version of *Sang Sinchai* is the earliest version of the text, which was originally composed in the 18th century before the fall of the Ayutthaya kingdom in 1767. Accordingly, this version is part of the long textual tradition of *Sang Sinchai*, a text of classical Siamese poetry that became less popular and less well-known over the following centuries.

Another masterpiece of classical Thai literature is analyzed by Sutheera Satayaphan. Her investigations in the genre of *bot lakhòn nòk* theatre plays examine extant dramatic manuscripts of the *Phra Rot-Meri* text preserved at the National Library of Thailand. The chapter scrutinizes the texts contained in these manuscripts and classifies them into different versions of the *Phra Rot-Meri* tale. It also studies paratextual elements to trace the uses and functions of traditional Siamese dramatic manuscripts, especially in a performing context. Sutheera points out the complex relationships within the genre of Thai performance literature and their extant manuscripts, something that should not be overlooked by modern scholars.

Part III of the volume, "Tai Manuscripts and Cultural Revival," is dedicated to the revival of Tai manuscripts in the context of the early 21st century. Phibul Choompolpaisal provides an up-to-date account of work on Tai Buddhist manuscripts with emphasis on work done in Thailand by various organizations and scholars. He explores some of the main common features among available Tai Buddhist manuscripts in different locations, such as titles, contents, scripts, and languages. He also examines the benefits of applying digital and database technologies to conservation work on Buddhist manuscripts in Thailand and elsewhere and on how such technologies enable researchers to identify manuscripts with the same titles or contents in different locations around the world. Finally, he discusses attempts to revive manuscript cultures as living traditions in various Buddhist communities and concludes with an analysis of human, social, psychological, cultural, and technological factors that hinder the progress of work and research on Tai Buddhist manuscripts.

Volker Grabowsky's chapter concentrates on several newly discovered collections in various monasteries in the old royal capital of Luang

Prabang, the traditional center of Lao Buddhism. Based on metadata gained from analysis of these collections, the author reflects on the production and usage of traditional Lao manuscripts. Special attention is given to the manuscripts' paratexts, especially colophons, which are often overlooked by philologists and historians, who are mostly interested in the texts rather than the manuscripts as objects. Paratexts record details about scribes, sponsors, and donors, as well as the production dates of the manuscripts. Finally, Grabowsky provides insights into the use and transmission of manuscripts and into "manuscript economy."

The next chapter, by Achariya Choowonglert, studies the role of manuscripts in recording history from the perspective of Tai ethnic groups living in north-central Vietnam and the impact of manuscripts on disparate cultural politics. It focuses on the resurgence of local Tai manuscript culture in Vietnam since 2004, when the Tai Thanh script was revived in the writing of local histories and thus became a marker of local Tai identity. Achariya demonstrates how local Tai intellectuals review manuscripts in a wider social context to write Tai history in a way that turns the process of "*Kinh* (Viet)-ization" to "Tai-ization," so creating cultural rights for ethnic minorities and constructing ethnic identities. This is a process of creating power for people who choose marginality and harnessing this power to build centers of cultural prosperity and history.

The last chapter of the volume, by Roger Casas, is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork among monastic communities in Sipsòng Panna. It discusses the revival of the Tham Lü script in the Tai autonomous prefecture in southern Yunnan province, highlighting a new computerized Unicode font as a medium of communication, notably among younger monks and novices. Associated with monastic spheres, the Tham script is being employed in social media to configure monastic identities in the Tai-speaking areas of southwest China. The recent development of a Tham script Unicode font has facilitated its use on mobile phones and other electronic devices, a domain formerly dominated by Chinese scripts. It raises speculation about the potential effect that this development may have in generating locality among Tai Lü communities, monastic and otherwise.

The manuscript cultures and epigraphy of the Tai world embrace a wealth of knowledge beyond the capacity of this volume, given the enormous extent of corpora and cultural areas, and the variety and complexity of methodological approaches. However, the contributions gathered in this volume demonstrate that Tai manuscript cultures and epigraphy contain a wide range of unexplored research areas and highlight the dynamics of Tai writing over the course of time. We hope this inspires modern scholars in further research in the years to come.

## Endnote: Introduction

1. Debates concerning the authenticity of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, the earliest written Thai-Tai record, appear in: Chamberlain, 1991; Krom Sinlapakòn, 2004; Piriya, 1989; and Terwiel, 2010.

2. The script has been called the Thai Nòi script by Thai scholars, especially when found in northeast Thailand (see Thawat 2006, 246–48).

3. For the concept of the Dhamma Script Cultural Domain, see Grabowsky 2011.

4. This collection by Santi and Nawarat Pakdeekham (2018), entitled *Prawattisat Ayutthaya Cak Carük: Carük Samai Ayutthaya* (History of Ayutthaya from Inscriptions: The Inscriptions of the Ayutthaya Period), has filled a gap in Thai epigraphic literature as it is the first published corpus of Ayutthaya inscriptions (Skilling 2018, 121).

5. Except for the *Collection of the Wat Phra Chetuphon Inscriptions* (*Prachum Carük Wat Phra Chetuphon*), a unique collection of inscriptions on secular treatises and poetry at Wat Phra Chetuphon or Wat Pho monastery in Bangkok (dated 1831–1832), which was published as a separate corpus in two volumes in 1929.

6. The earliest palm-leaf manuscript written in the Tham Lan Na script is dated 1471: the manuscript of *Tiṃsa-nipāta* from Wat Lai Hin monastery in Lampang Province (northern Thailand) (von Hinüber, 1996: 35), while the earliest Siamese palm-leaf manuscript written in Khòm script is entitled *Dutiya Pācittiyavaṇṇanā*, dated 1615 (Kongkaew 2002, 29, 91). The main texts of both manuscripts are written in Pāli, but also contain a short passage of scribal colophons in the vernacular.

7. For example, the Inscription of Wat Khema (Inscription No. 14), dated 1536, provides a list of objects offered to the monastery that refers to a covering cloth for the Dhamma manuscript and an "incised" manuscript of the *Vessantara Jātaka* (Hò Samut Haeng Chat 2005, 282), suggesting the use of palm-leaf manuscripts in monasteries. The Inscription of Wat Chang Lòm (dated 1384) also mentions the Tipiṭaka Hall of the monastery, serving as its manuscript repository (*Corpus of Inscription VIII: Sukhothai Inscriptions*, 2005, 145; Kongkaew 2002, 27).

8. The term "leporello" is adapted for traditional paper manuscripts to describe a concertina-like method of folding a long piece of paper to form a book. This type of manuscript is also referred to as a folded book (for example in: Gaur 1979, 20; Igunma 2013, 631). According to Terwiel (2014: 42), the term derives from the servant Leporello in Mozart's opera Don Giovanni (premiered in 1787), specifically to Leporello's list of the romantic conquests of his master, Don Giovanni, who was so successful in his seductions that the record needed to be folded and refolded as the list grew.

9. For more details on *khòi*-paper production, see Kongkaew (2010).

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# PART 1

# SCRIPTS, INSCRIPTIONS, AND MANUSCRIPTS

# The Inscriptions of the Lan Na and Lan Xang Kingdoms: A New Approach to Cross-Border History[1]

**MICHEL LORRILLARD**

## Introduction

Among the principal written sources that enable us to address the ancient past of the Tai-Lao kingdoms of Lan Na and Lan Xang are hundreds of stele inscriptions which provide first-hand information. Historians, however, have not yet made effective use of these documents, perhaps because they have had difficulty in grasping them as a whole and in their diversity. The inscriptions of Lan Na and Lan Xang come from an expansive and physically heterogeneous area that includes the entire north and northeast of Thailand, all of Laos, and some territories in Burma. The geographical dispersion of these sources and the lack of published documentation have severely limited their inclusion in historical research pertaining to the northern Tai *müang*. For the value of the inscriptions to be plainly appreciated, they must be studied as a comprehensive series. Up to the present, this has been difficult to accomplish on a large scale.

## The search for the sources

Epigraphic studies in the northern Tai regions have made singular progress over the past 20 years. A decisive step was taken in 1997 with the publication by Hans Penth, Phanphen Khrüathai, and Silao Ketphrom of the *Corpus of Lan Na Inscriptions* (ประชุมจารึกล้านนา). To date, 15 volumes have been issued, the most recent in 2013.[2] This collection does not cover epigraphic sources of Lan Na comprehensively, and its continuation is uncertain since the demise of Hans Penth. However, it does regroup most inscriptions on steles from the golden age of the Lan Na kingdom; other inscriptions have been edited through a less-extensive critical process in various publications.[3] The first systematic research on inscriptions of the ancient Tai-Lao kingdom of Lan Xang dates back to the 1976 thesis by Pierre-Marie Gagneux on epigraphic sources conserved in Vientiane.[4] A decade later, Thawat Punnothok widened the geographical framework of this study by publishing an exhaustive compilation of Lao inscriptions of northeast Thailand.[5] Since 2003, investigations in all provinces of Laos by the Vientiane center of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) have enabled a relatively accurate depiction of epigraphic heritage throughout the country, particularly with respect to spatial distribution and chronological order.[6]

## General problems

No single synthetic study on the stone inscriptions of Lan Na and Lan Xang[7] exists, notwithstanding the statistical tables published by Hans Penth,[8] a catalog and glossary by Marek Buchmann,[9] and epigraphic data in works by Volker Grabowsky.[10] Certain basic questions, notably regarding modalities contributing to the formation and development of the corpora of inscriptions from Lan Na and Lan Xang, still need to be addressed.

The institutionalized practice of engraving texts in stone is not self-evident — and it is not common to all civilizations. Its apparition was spontaneous only in the most ancient of historical periods. Later, it was transmitted through a mimesis effect, borrowing from neighboring or preceding cultures. This important process must be studied, particularly in the kingdoms of Sukhothai and Lan Na, where the allogeneic culture, initially constituted of Tai elements originating in southern China, developed in the north of Thailand through contact with local substrata and strong influences from the east, south, and west.

The transmission of epigraphic practice from one culture to another brings modifications. The recipient terrain must, above all, be amenable to its development. The practice of engraving texts responds to precise needs and objectives when it becomes institutionalized as a tool of civil authority. If the conditions necessary for its diffusion are not brought together, it quickly becomes artificial and its disappearance is inevitable. The study of epigraphic sources is thus inseparable from that of the context in which they are produced. Inscriptions participate in the functioning of society. They provide real and conjunctural data, imperceptible through sole reliance on chronicles.

In the case of Lan Na and Lan Xang, a separate study of the two epigraphic corpora has already furnished a large amount of data illuminating structural aspects of the history of the two kingdoms, notably economic and social questions. A comparative analysis of these corpora, by highlighting the common and differential elements, will however allow us to refine the perception of certain phenomena by contextualizing them in a more complete system of references.

Data suited to comparisons within the framework of the study of the lapidary corpus of Lan Na and Lan Xang can be classified into two broad categories: the material nature of the inscriptions and the textual aspect. The material nature relates to the inscribed stele itself, that is to say, to the date of the preparation and engraving of the stone, the geographical origin of the document, and its physical appearance.

## Time and space

To identify the age of an inscribed stele is above all to date its text. In certain cases, the date of the text could be significantly later than initial preparation of the support. This distinction is essential for understanding the context in which inscriptions were produced – Lan Na and Lan Xang indeed offering very different situations in this regard.

Currently, it is not possible to reconstruct with certainty the process that led to the apparition and diffusion of writing in Lan Na.[11] The situation is clearer in the case of Lan Xang, since the systems of notation were borrowed manifestly from Lan Na. This is certain for the Tham (Dhamma) script, a religious script derived from Mon writing in western regions and not from cultures along the banks of the Mekong. This is also obvious in the case of Lao civil writing, which has long carried the mark of the *Fak kham* script used in Northern Thailand.[12]

From a chronological perspective, on the basis of remains found, the first inscriptions of Lan Xang were almost a century later than those of Lan Na, which were drafted in the *Fak kham* script. Putting aside certain undated inscription fragments and the famous inscription of Wat Phra Yuen in Lamphun that relates more to the epigraphic corpus of Sukhothai, the oldest Tai inscriptions found in the upper north of present-day Thailand date from 1411 and are linked to an important personage governing in Phayao.[13] It is not until 50 years later that there was real development in the production of steles. In the case of Lan Xang — disregarding two short cave inscriptions at Luang Prabang with a script that seems to testify to contact with Sukhothai in the early 14th century[14] — the oldest dated inscription is on a small stele at Müang Sanakham, on the banks of the Mekong between Luang Prabang and Vientiane. It indicates the year 1510 and refers to King Sumphu, who reigned a few years earlier.

The use of the Tham script in Lan Na inscriptions most likely postdates that of *Fak kham* – the first example, found on the pedestal of a Buddha image, being dated 1465 – even though it is already evidenced on an engraved gold plaque found in Sukhothai that indicates the year 1376. it hardly appears on steles written in Tai language before the 17th century but it then definitively replaces the *Fak kham* script. On occasion, before the conquest of Chiang Mai by the Burmese in 1558, it was used specifically to transcribe a short formula in Pāli placed as an introduction, as on a Chiang Saen stele inscribed in 1488. In Laos, the most ancient example of the Tham script dates from 1527 (Wat Sangkhalok, Luang Prabang); however, it is exceptional, when compared to ancient Lan Na inscriptions at the same time, in that it was used to write an entire text in the Tai language. This particularity is reproduced several times in the stone inscriptions of Lan Xang during the second half of the 16th century.

The important lag in time between inscriptions originating in the two different kingdoms is not surprising: stone engraving is only one of multiple practices that were borrowed from the *müang* of Northern Thailand and diffused along the length of the Mekong. Accompanying developments included expansion of a renewed form of Buddhism, as well as the royal ideology with which it was associated.[15]

Evidence reveals that the practice of engraving inscriptions on steles in Lan Na attained an exceptional level during the consecutive reigns of three sovereigns: Tilokarat (1442–1487), Yot Chiang Rai (1487–1495), and Phra Müang Kaeo (1495–1526). This 80-year period corresponds to the "Golden Age" of the kingdom. Interestingly, coinciding with the end of the reign of Phra Müang Kaeo, the beginning of the reign of Phothisarat in Lan Xang marks the start of almost 100 years during which practically all the steles inscribed in the kingdom were produced. Since this period is undeniably marked by profound transformations (it is probable that the arrival in 1558 of refugees from Lan Na strongly stimulated new activities), one would in any case hesitate to qualify it as a "Golden Age." This term could be applied more appropriately to the calmer period of the Suriyavongsa government. However, there is a paradox: this reign, which occupied a good portion of the 17th century and ended with the disintegration of the kingdom into three rival regions, provides little epigraphic evidence. Moreover, no sources mention the sovereign, even by implication.[16]

In Lan Na, the number of inscriptions between the beginning of the 15th century to 1639 is few more than 120 on steles with confirmed dates, plus some 50 others that do not exhibit chronological indications, but bear characteristics indicating an ancient origin. It took another century before additional evidence appeared. For this same period in Lan Xang, there are around 80 stele inscriptions, roughly half the production of Lan Na.[17] This still large figure, however, is not sufficient to reflect the extent of the difference that exists between the epigraphic sources of the two kingdoms, as it masks the "qualitative" aspect, which is significantly lower in the case of Lan Xang. Many Lao inscriptions — at least half of the corpus — are characterized by brevity of content (texts rarely consist of more than a dozen lines) and, therefore, the poverty of information delivered.

In terms of distribution, the Lao inscriptions present a more striking contrast than those of northern Thailand because while the latter are distributed relatively equally over a vast territory, the former are for the most part (approximately 85%) concentrated in the Laotian province of Vientiane and in the Thai provinces of Nong Khai and Udon Thani, which have immediate proximity to the Lao capital. This limitation of the area of extension of inscriptions seems to have been constant, since the oldest examples of engraved steles, prior to the choice of Vientiane as a royal city, are practically all located in the region near Luang Prabang, the first capital of Lan Xang. The difference in this respect between this kingdom and that of the Lan Na may be quite revealing of the limits reached in each space by effective royal authority.

# Accidents of history

At this stage, it is useful to question the extent to which the corpus is representative of the past contexts. Accidents of history are numerous. Our vision can be affected by the disappearance of a certain number of sources or, more simply, by the fact that an important part of them have not yet been discovered. Documentation certainly includes important gaps. It is equally certain that essential historical evidence has disappeared irrevocably. Based on comparisons between different local corpora and other types of sources, such as archaeological remains and chronicles, the balance of epigraphic sources at our disposition today is illogical and out of equilibrium — without doubt the consequence of serious disturbances.

The capitals of the two kingdoms are deeply implicated in this disequilibrium. It is curious how few Tai inscriptions have been found in Chiang Mai in comparison with the number discovered, for example, in Phayao, even though the capital accounted for a very large number of monuments and temples, including the most prestigious. What happened to the great inscriptions that commemorated the foundings and donations documented in an important religious chronicle dating from the beginning of the 16th century, the *Jīnakālamālī*?[18] It is indeed not logical that steles have been found for small temples located in marginal territories, and that they did not exist for the large city temples proven important by chronicles and archaeological remains. We know that the production of inscriptions dropped suddenly in Lan Na from the middle of the 16th century. This fact is certainly related to the long installation at Chiang Mai of a local power controlled by the Burmese. It would be logical for them to have profoundly modified and weakened, if only by substituting their authority for that of the legitimate sovereign, the ancient civil and religious networks by which orders were transmitted in the kingdom - and of which the stele constituted reliable records, by the perenniality and fixity of their support. If the alteration of the administrative apparatus, from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, led to the disappearance in Lan Na of the practice of engraving in stone ordinances fixing the local relationship between civil and religious affairs, the earlier acts, on the other hand, remained physically in most of the territory, where they were in any case no longer of use. In Chiang Mai, it was in any case not difficult to eradicate documents that could constitute an embarrassment for the new power, because they maintained on the one hand the memory of an old legitimate authority and presented as such a danger – and on the other hand justified privileges that no longer had any reason to be.[19]

Many stele inscriptions also disappeared from Vientiane, even though the conditions leading to this were very different. Setting aside three inscriptions linked to That Luang, a monument already located on the margins of the city, none of the acts commemorating the foundations and donations relating to the great temples of the capital prior to the 19th century have been preserved in stone. Inscriptions of less important temples were however found outside the historical center of Vientiane. The Siamese troops sacked the city after recapturing it in 1828 to ensure the definitive disappearance of its power. A number of inscriptions probably suffered the same fate as other signs of Lao power at this time, including the chronicles produced in the capital: they were consigned to destruction. At least one example of a large inscribed stele was transported by the victorious troops to the right bank, that of Vat Ho Phra Kaeo.

The brutal modification of historical context is sometimes perceptible only in the gaps created by the sudden absence of certain types of sources in existing documentation. The existence of small peripheral inscriptions highlights the absence of large inscriptions. In the same way, numerous and widely distributed inscriptions from the reigns of Setthathirat in the middle of the 16th century and No Müang at the end of the same century illuminate the difficulties or differing characters of intermediary and later reigns, such as that of Suriyavongsa in the second half of the 17th century.

# The object

One cannot forget in the external criticism of the stele inscriptions of the Lan Na and the Lan Xang the questions relating to their very support. These offer insights that allow for a much more accurate approach to the contexts in which the writings were set. One need only visit the museums in Chiang Saen, Phayao, and Lamphun to realize the quality of execution achieved for some of these documents.

A detailed and exhaustive comparative analysis of the forms of all steles found to date would certainly be profitable. This would permit identification of the production sites and hence establish provenance of documents that have been displaced. It would also facilitate study of the influence between different workshops and the transmission networks of certain techniques. This research would ideally consider aspects of physical geography to identify regions where stele materials were extracted. Mineralogical analysis of Cambodian inscriptions already demonstrates the validity of this type of investigation. It could be that stones used by the Tai for engraving, which were works of real specialists, were much travelled before an inscription was drafted.

The stele itself was certainly a highly valued manufactured product. The region of Phayao might have occupied a particular place in the production of stone objects. The greatest number of steles has been found in this province. They are distinguished generally by their size, variety of form, and quality. This is also the location where most of the oldest examples of Tai inscriptions were produced. It features a specific type of production: Buddha images in stone, concurrent in this important *müang* with Buddha images in bronze.

In Phayao, as in Phrae and Nan where very old epigraphic remains were found, the influence from Sukhothai was probably decisive. There is a correspondence between important four-sided steles found in this kingdom and several examples recovered in Phayao. The ancient Mon city of Haripunchai also presented models of engraved steles, and their massive stature undoubtedly impressed Tai artisans greatly, particularly in the region of Chiang Mai. However, the production of these Mon inscriptions seems to have been limited to a short period at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries and an interruption of the practice for nearly two centuries may well have occurred.

The methods of production of lapidary documents in Lan Xang appear to have been quite different. Qualitatively speaking, the execution of the majority of inscribed steles in the Lao kingdom is significantly inferior to that of steles of the northern Tai kingdom. They differ in size, regularity of form, and preparation of the stone, rendering the final stage of engraving much more difficult. Ultimately, the result often appears untidy, be it the support or the inscription. We do have about 20 or so examples where the work of shaping the stone was carried out with the clearest concern to produce a beautiful object, but various clues show us that these were not necessarily made by the expected craftmen, i.e. Lao sculptors. In several cases, Lan Xang engravers reused pre-existing supports, sculpted several centuries before by artisans of a different culture. These include the *sema* of the Mon, a characteristic object that spread though most of the middle valley of the Mekong during the second half of the first millennium. This type of ritual marker, often ornamented with a stylized image of a *stupa*, has been found in great numbers on the Vientiane plain and the area on the opposite bank of the river.[20] Lao lapidaries needed only to fully or partially slice off the Mon bas-reliefs to engrave text on the liberated surface. Some inscribed steles in Lan Xang were produced rapidly in this way, without effective technical preparation of the stone, the mastery of which seemed to have eluded the Lao sculptors (who had proven skill in working bronze).

During the second half of the 16th century, production of inscriptions in Lan Xang probably benefited from the arrival in the kingdom of stone sculptors and engravers escaping from Lan Na. The most beautiful realization of steles was concentrated during the reigns of Setthathirat and his immediate successors. Northern Thai influence is found in both rhetorical and written styles of that period. These stone engraving specialists were perhaps the *phan nangsü*, who are frequently referenced in Lan Na inscriptions. Another characteristic that proves the exceptional influence of Lan Na traditions on those of Lan Xang is a very rich calendric system, mixing text and graphic data (using a horoscopic disk), based on complex calculations requiring consultation with specialists.[21] Lao calendric data appears to be specific because, given the more limited geographic distribution of the inscriptions, it refers to a single system of monthly calculations instead of the three systems in use at the time in Lan Na. This system, identical to that of Sukhothai, demonstrates the ancient influence of this kingdom.

## The text

Comparison of the Lan Xang and Lan Na epigraphic corpora through the prism of internal critique, that is to say analysis of texts, reveals the greatest number of results. Only a few observations are presented, as research on these corpora is still in the initial stage.

In general, the principal purpose of the large majority of Lan Na and Lan Xang stele inscriptions seems identical: to register (more than to commemorate) gifts to newly created or ancient sanctuary of property, human resources, or products. The religious community thus irrevocably received rights held in principle by the sovereign. Rhetoric used in stele inscriptions refers most often to religious acts of faith. Such motivation is also found in other types of inscriptions, notably those inscribed on Buddha images. In this last case, the donor formulates aspirations with fervor and sincerity — anticipating great recompense for the meritorious value of the offering — whereas in the first case the discourse conforms to a rigid and conventional model, largely masking individual intention with collective action. The primary motivation for making an offering to a sanctuary is thus neither eschatological nor personal (even if the merit of the action is supposed to benefit the sovereign or one of his relatives). The offering caters more to civil than religious preoccupations. The lay character of the formulation is primary, other than in a few exceptions, and the content of the inscription is marked above all by material considerations. The use of the *Fak kham* script might prove that the objectives go beyond the strictly religious world and are expressed through secular practice linked to the functioning of society. The act registered and preserved by the inscription brings the religious community guaranteed methods of subsistence, ensuring important resources for rapid expansion of influence. From this mechanism, royal power asserts its authority in distant lands. The presence of the sovereign is inscribed in the territory through the implantation of a powerful network of monasteries. This is more effective in relaying and transmitting central policy than representatives, who belong to a fragile apparatus vulnerable to events.

Stone inscriptions can thus be assimilated into actual administrative acts. This function is signified by the term "*ājñā*" (power, by extension decree), which is associated with the royal person. It often appeared on the steles of Lan Na (as well as *rāja ongkān*) and was later used in a quasi-systematic manner in the most highly regarded Lan Xang inscriptions. In this setting, it indicates, from the first lines, a superior and inviolable order. Given the stereotypical character that Lao steles' formulation quickly acquired, they seem less ambiguous than the steles of Northern-Thailand, where royal authority is not expressed with as much weight. However, one may wonder about the type of reality that these differences in rhetoric really covered. If the Lan Na inscriptions give the impression that royal intervention was sometimes remote, did it nevertheless have less impact than in the Lan Xang, where the conventional and rigid wording of the inscriptions tends to present it as omnipresent and omnipotent? This is only one aspect of the problem, for the distinction in style between the northern Thai inscriptions and the Lao inscriptions is in fact much more important. The former favor narrative style and freedom of expression that at times lead to difficulties in interpretation. Over more than 150 years, they have generated a mass of contextualized information that often transcends the local level. An impression of life and movement emerges, endowing each text with a unique character. Lao inscriptions followed this tendency early on, with a few examples dating from the reigns of Phothisarat and Setthathirat. However, they conformed quickly to a fixed model with information limited to measures, values, and names of individuals. This uniformity and simplification may correspond to a sclerosis in practice, as though it never truly acclimatized to Lan Xang. Lao royal charters engraved in stone intended for sanctuaries disappeared in the middle of the 17th century. Unlike Lan Na, no external upheaval can explain this phenomenon.

The spatial distribution of Lan Na stele inscriptions proves an equilibrium that is confirmed by the characteristics of their content; the quality of discourse is almost universal, proving homogeneity of cultural practice and social models over a vast territory. This is not the case for the inscriptions of Lan Xang, which are limited to a small part of the territory and show differences in quality of content, suggesting significant differences in written practice, social structure, and local representation of power.

The narrative and descriptive styles used in Lan Na inscriptions permit a vibrant approach to the context in which these documents were produced. The number of references made to various personages of differing positions and titles shows, more than in the chronicles, a particularly developed social organization. The indexation effected by Hans Penth and his team furnished highly enriched research material, with some 5,260 references to names and positions registered based on 270 inscriptions (comprising supports other than steles and going beyond the chronological confines of the Golden Age of Lan Na). Although this enormous quantity of references remains to be analyzed, most refer to individuals in a hierarchical and highly organized system, each relaying policy from a centralized authority according to their competency and talent. Lao inscriptions of the 16th century are a pale reflection of this system, although its foundation was inherent to the Tai mode of organization. They make reference to a few important lords, as do the chronicles, but they never present a veritable corps of agents acting on royal authority and intermediaries appointed to effect implementation, as in the epigraphic corpus of Lan Na. It appears that Lan Xang lacked the rich and complex institutional apparatus developed by its powerful neighbor, perhaps because the prerequisites for its existence were never consolidated.

It would be interesting to evaluate the true role of donations and the granting of privileges through royal prerogative, as well as their economic consequences. It is highly unlikely that the sovereign's estate suffered from the abandonment of land. This may not have been the same for seigniorial benefits, given the insistence in the inscriptions on preventing misappropriation of royal donations for the profit of local powers.

The contextual data of donations made to sanctuaries implies a great deal about aspects of the economic situation in the two kingdoms, notably production capacity, type and value of crops, and workforce. A comparison of the corpora of Lan Na and Lan Xang offers elements to distinguish the two kingdoms on the important questions of subsistence and, in particular, the role of riziculture. Lan Xang never attained levels of production on the banks of the Mekong comparable to those that geographic advantages and human organization made possible on the great plains around Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. Questions about manufacturing and commerce cannot be answered as precisely. However, inscriptions show that a monetary economy existed in both Lan Na and Lan Xang, at least in rudimentary form. The numerical values indicated by scribes should, however, be approached with caution, in particular any reaching several thousand units.

The epigraphic corpora of Lan Na and Lan Xang clarify the position occupied by religious communities in Tai local societies and the ways their subsistence and position were guaranteed. Placing aside the smaller monastic grid in the Lao milieu, there were no flagrant material differences between the temples of Lan Na and Lan Xang, despite the fact that the latter were conceived according to a less complex format. However, inscriptions of the northern Tai kingdom raise questions about ritual practice absent from the inscriptions along the Mekong. The Lao kingdom undoubtedly received echoes of divergences that led the Sangha of Lan Na to separate into distinct *nikāya*. Currently available sources do not show a similar situation in Lan Xang, except epigraphic data that attests to Phothisarat's determination to purify religion in a temple in Luang Prabang and in Vientiane monasteries.[22] In general, the Lao religious community was late in receiving, in an incomplete process, the scholastic traditions that gave northern Tai Buddhism its great reputation. Lan Na inscriptions are believed to contain information on this subject that allows re-contextualization of the general situation. This inquiry should counter-balance the religious chronicles of Lan Na that have caused bias in the perception of the history of different Buddhist communities. The more reformist movements have not been confirmed to have had the impact on the entire kingdom that certain texts suggest. Generally, the inscriptions show homogeneity in practice, except perhaps during the short period at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. Moreover, the duration of the controversies, which must have agitated the clergy, is uncertain.

## Conclusion

The epigraphic corpora of Lan Na and Lan Xang represent for the historical knowledge of these kingdoms an exceptional documentary potential. From the point of view of factual history, which has largely prevailed until today, they offer the extraordinary possibility of confirming general chronology exposed by local historiographical traditions, in particular in Chiang Mai, Luang Prabang, and Vientiane. They also complement the chronicles by providing precise data which, by their number and their geographical and chronological distribution, make it possible to approach the past economic and social contexts of these kingdoms. Although not all periods can be treated in the same way, it is in any case possible for certain eras, such as the forty years covering the reigns of Phra Yot Chiang Rai and Phra Müang Kaeo, at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, to gather sufficient information to engage in a macroscopic approach and to propose a vivid image of Tai society in some of its aspects. There is also a certain interest in studying each of the two corpora in the mirror of the other: their similarities, as well as the differences that they highlight, contribute to refining in an important way our vision of the political, economic and cultural balances that have characterized the different phases of the regional history of the Tai-Lao peoples.

# Appendix

## Inscription of Vat Visun (Luang Prabang), 16th century

This inscription was discovered at Vat Visun in Luang Prabang by Auguste Pavie on February 21, 1887. It is inscribed on a 38 cm high schist plate.

The text is one of the first Lao royal ordinances. It deals with part of the donations that, according to handwritten chronicles, were made to the statue of Phra Bang when it was installed in Vat Visun during the first quarter of the 16th century. However, the writing is very similar to a type of the *Fak kham* script used in the Lan Na territory during the second half of the same century.

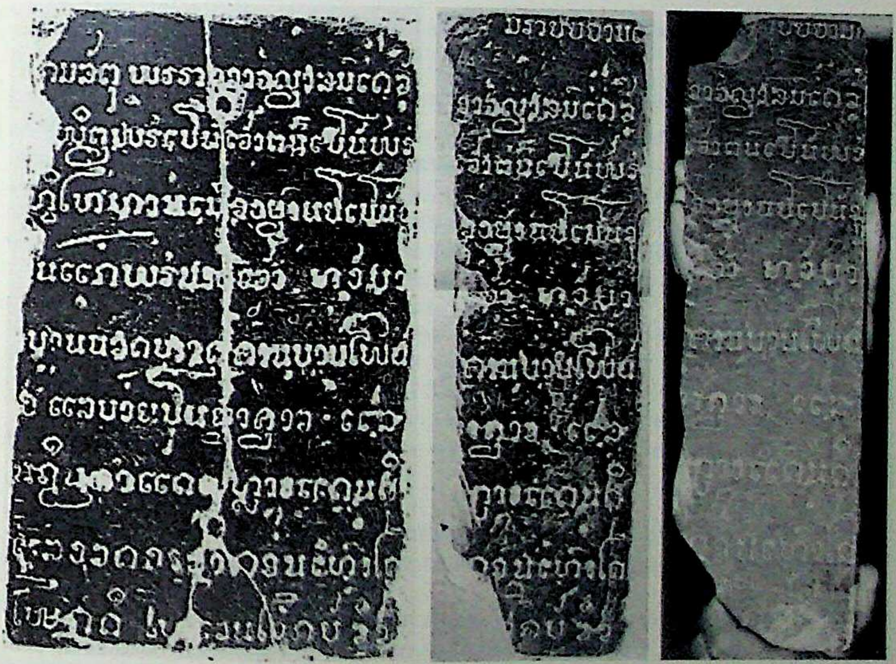

**Figure 1** (left to right):
Rubbing of the complete inscription. (Mission Pavie, 1898)
Rubbing of the remaining part of the inscription at the beginning of the 20th century. (EFEO)
Picture of the remaining part of the inscription at the Museum of History in Hanoi. (Lorrillard)

| **Transcription in Thaï script of the original text:** | **Transcription in modern Lao script and language:** | **Translation:** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. [. . .]มีร[ว]ายยียามตู[ด . . .] | 1. -ມື້ຣ(ວ)າຍຍີຍາມຕູ(ດ)- | 1. . . . the day *raway yi*, the watch of (tut . . .) |
| 2. [ษุ]ภมัสตุ พรราขอาจญา สมเด้จ | 2. [ສຸ]ພະມັດສະຕຸ ພຣະຣາຊອາດຍາ ສົມເດັດ | 2. May there be happiness! The royal ordinance of His |
| 3. [บํรมบํ]พิต พร่เป็นเจ้าตน เป็นพร่ | 3. [ບໍຣະມະບໍ]ພິດ ພຣະເປັນເຈົ້າຕົນ ເປັນພຣະ | 3. Supreme, Pure and Sovereign Majesty, |
| 4. [ปะสิ]ที่ไหทาน เมืองผาน้อย เป็นอุ | 4. [ປະສິ]ດທິໃຫ້ທານເມືອງຜານ້ອຍ ເປັນອຸ- | 4. blessing the gift of Müang Pha Nôt for the |
| 5. [ปะกา]น แกพร่บางเจ้า ทังบา | 5. [ປະກາ]ນແກ່ພຣະບາງເຈົ້າ ທັງບ້າ- | 5. service of the Phra Bang Chao, with Ban |
| 6. [น. . .] บานนอดหาดคาน บานโพน | 6. [ນX] ບ້ານນອດຫາດຄານ ບ້ານໂພນ | 6. (), Ban Not Hat Khan, Ban Phon |
| 7. [ทอ]งแล บานปุนผาคาวแล | 7. [ທອ]ງແລ ບ້ານປູນຜາຄາວ ແລ | 7. (Tho)ng, Ban Pun Pha Khrao and |
| 8. [บา]นถีนคำแดง หลางแดนดิ | 8. [ບ້າ]ນຖິ່ນຄຳແດງ ຫລ້າງແດນດິ- | 8. (Ba)n Thin Kham Daeng. The lands, |
| 9. [น]แล งวดงาอากอนเทาใด | 9. [ນ]ແລ ງວດງາອາກອນເທົ່າໃດ | 9. the taxes and the contributions of all kinds, |
| 10. [ขา]ไพก่ดี ใหเวนไวกับ วิชุ | 10. [ຂ້າ]ໄພ່ກໍ່ດີ ໃຫ້ເວນໄວ້ກັບວິຊຸ- | 10. as well as the servants, are to be given to the Viju- |
| 11. [ระอาราม] . . . | 11. [ນອາຣາມ] . . . | 11. (ra-āram) . . . |

# Endnote: The Inscriptions of the Lan Na and Lan Xang Kingdoms

1. A first French version of this contribution was published under the title "Les inscriptions sur stèle du Lān Nā et du Lān Xāng (XVe–XVIIe siècles) — Pour une approche nouvelle des royaumes t'ai septentrionaux", in *Péninsule* 74 (2017–1), 2017, pp. 5–30.

2. See the complete list in the References.

3. The two volumes (each containing a book text and a book plates) of the Lan Na Inscriptions (จารึกล้านนา), 1992 and 2008, as well as the *Inscriptional History of Phayao* (ประชุมจารึกเมืองพะเยา), 1995, bring together a large number of specific inscriptions from northern Thailand. Such collections as the eight volumes of *Corpus of Inscriptions* (ประชุมศิลาจารึก) and the fifth volume of *Inscriptions of Thailand* (จารึกในประเทศไทย), 1986, as well as such journals as *Silapakorn*, offer more scattered data. In his catalog (vol. 2) of *Northern Thai Stone Inscriptions*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2012, Marek Buchmann provides a valuable research tool by specifying the bibliographical indications of 239 lapidary inscriptions. His glossary (vol. 1, 2011) and his grammar (vol. 3, 2015), based on a large selection of these sources, are also very useful. For inscriptions on Buddha of Lan Na, refer to A.B. Griswold (1957) and to H. Penth (1976).

4. *Contribution à la connaissance de la civilisation laotienne d'après l'épigraphie du royaume de Vientiane (xve–xixe siècles)*, PhD dissertation, EPHE, Paris, 1976.

5. *'Isan' inscriptions from the Thai-Lao period: Epigraphic and Historical Studies about Isan*, Bangkok, Ramkhamhaeng University, 1987.

ธวัช ปุณโณทก, *ศิลาจารึกอีสานสมัยไทย-ลาว: ศึกษาทางด้านอักษรวิทยาและประวัติศาสตร์อีสาน*.

6. For results specific to the epigraphical sources of these investigations: cf. M. Lorrillard, "Research on the Inscriptions in Laos: Current Situation and Perspectives." In: Perret, D. ed., *Writing fo Eternity: A Survey of Epigraphy in Southeast Asia*, Études thématique n°30, EFEO, Paris, 2018, pp. 87–107. The EFEO center in Vientiane is currently preparing an exhaustive edition of these texts, with a first volume entitled *Recueil des inscriptions sur stèle du royaume lao du Lan Xang*. For an overview of the remains and materials found in Lao PDR: M. Lorrillard, "Pour une géographie historique du bouddhisme au Laos." In: Goudineau, Y. & Lorrillard, M. eds., *Recherches nouvelles sur le Laos*, Études thématiques n°18, EFEO, Vientiane–Paris, 2008, pp. 113–81.

7. An excellent analysis of the data provided by northern Thai inscriptions from an important economic perspective: Penth, H., "On Rice and Rice Fields in Old Lan Na — Texts, Translations, Interpretations." In: *JSS* 91, 2003, pp. 90–188. For a panorama of the most important Lao inscriptions of the 16th century: cf. Lorrillard, M., "Les inscriptions du That Luang de Vientiane: données nouvelles sur l'histoire d'un *stūpa* lao." In: *BEFEO* 90–91, 2003, pp. 289–348.

8. *Bulletin of the Archives of Lan Na Inscriptions* (5 vols.), Chiang Mai University, 1982–1993; *Index to Lan Na Inscriptions — Part 1: Persons and Titles*, Chiang Mai University, 2006.

*ดรรชนีจารึกล้านนา ภาค ๑: ชื่อและตำแหน่งบุคคล*.

9. *Op. cit.*

10. "Population and state in Lan Na prior to the mid-sixteenth century." In: *JSS* 93, 2005, pp. 1–68; *Bevölkerung und Staat in Lan Na — Ein Beitrag zur Bevölkerungsgeschichte Südostasiens*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2004.

11. The origin of the Tai civil script remains problematic, especially the Sukhothai model, which seems to precede the *fak kham* model of the Lan Na from a paleographic point of view. Refer to the hypotheses of H. Penth (1986, 1996). With regard to the Tham religious script, the official thesis that it derives directly from the Mon script employed in Haripuñjaya (Lamphun) at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries seems dubious. This script was used first for the notation of the pāli language on palm-leaf manuscripts, which spread in the north of Thailand from the beginning of the 14th century at the latest. Accordingly, there is a good chance that this writing comes from Burma, probably the Mon coastal regions, and was assimilated by the Lan Na, and possibly other T'ai, along with the content of the texts.

12. Lorrillard, M., "Écriture et histoire: le cas du Laos." In: *Aséanie* n°22, 2008, pp. 63-84.

13. These are LB.09 and LB.27 (adopting M. Buchmann's inventory system), but probably also BY.44, BY.47 and BY.52, usually rejuvenated in a cycle of 60 years.

14. See M. Ferlus, "L'inscription rupestre de Nang An (Louang Phrabang)." In: *La Thaïlande des débuts de son histoire jusqu'au xve siècle*, Actes du premier symposium franco-thai (juillet 1988), Bangkok, 1995, pp. 110-14. Two problematic inscriptions from the province of Khammuan (central Laos) with chronological data that is undoubtedly indicated retrospectively also need to be reconsidered. The first comes from Ban Xieng Vang Tai, not far from the mouth of Se Bang Fai river, and bears the date December 8, 1386. The second is erected in front of That Sikhot, a few kilometers south of Tha Khaek, and indicates April 17, 1494. Both have been engraved on Khmer period materials that have therefore been reused.

15. Lorrillard, M., "Insights on the Diffusion of Lao Buddhism." In: Lagirarde, F. & Koanathakool, P.C., eds., *Buddhist Legacies in Mainland Southeast Asia*, Études thématiques, n°19, 2006, pp. 139-48.

16. The chronicles themselves are very lacunary for this time. However, other evidence indicates that, unlike in previous periods, Lan Xang enjoyed a certain prosperity under Suriyavongsa's reign, which was still favored by the political unity of the kingdom and its territorial integrity.

17. This figure is taken from our own inventory, which includes Lao inscriptions from Laos and from northeastern Thailand.

18. Cœdès, G., "Documents sur l'histoire politique et religieuse du Laos occidental." In: *BEFEO* t. XXV-1, 1925, pp. 1-201; Jayawickrama, N.A. (trad.), *The Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror*, London, Pali Text Society, 1978.

19. Note that the very long and eventful reign of Tilokarat raises the most questions: the number of inscriptions is abnormally low compared to the reigns of his two successors and a geographical imbalance emerged. Political reasons may not be the only ones involved. Religious issues and distinctions between the sects may also have factored.

20. Lorrillard, M., "La plaine de Vientiane au tournant du second millénaire: données nouvelles sur l'expansion des espaces khmer et môn anciens au Laos (II)." In: *BEFEO* 100 (daté 2014), EFEO, Paris, 2016, pp. 38-107; "Vientiane et le Mékong: situation de la ville dans l'espace régional et la longue durée." In: Clément-Charpentier, S. & al., eds., *Vientiane, architectures d'une capitale — Traces formes, structures, projets*, Les cahiers de l'Iprauss, éd. Recherches, Paris, 2010, pp. 33-50.

21. Cf. Eade, J.C., *The Thai Historical Record: A Computer Analysis*, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, 1996.

22. Unpublished inscription of Vat Savanthevalok or Vat Sangkhalok, Luang Prabang, 1527. (The chronicles echo the will of the king, apparently dictated by an important religious dignitary.) Vat Daen Müang's inscription no. 2, Phon Phixay, 1535 (see Thawat, *op. cit.* pp. 236-40).

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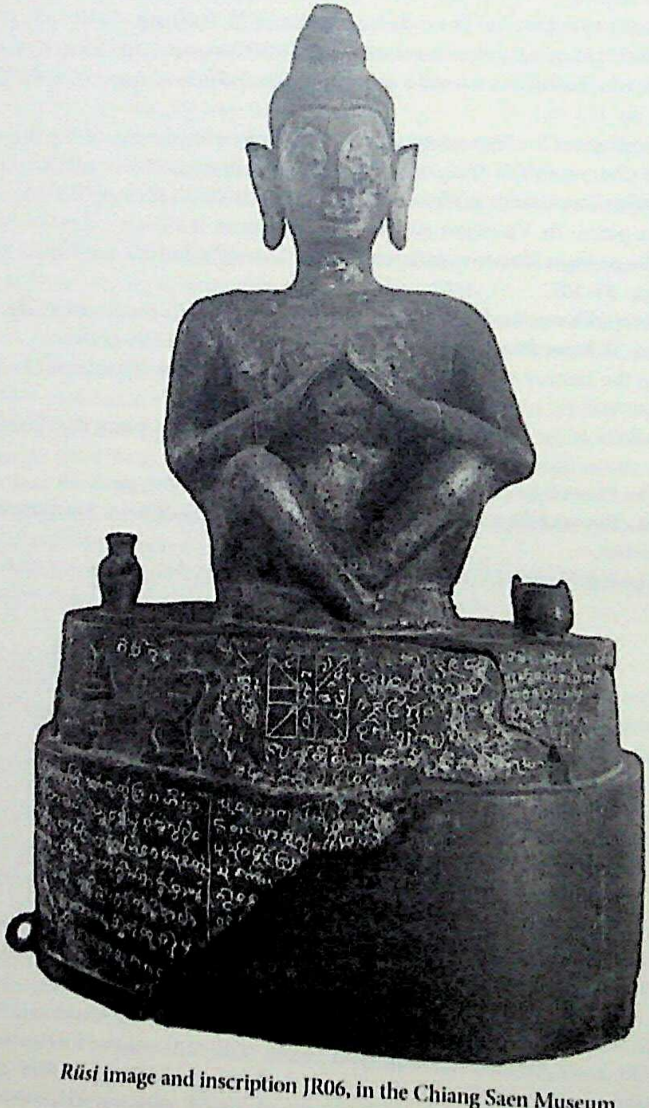

*Rüsi* image and inscription JR06, in the Chiang Saen Museum

# Northern Thai Epigraphy: Literacy, Religion, and Law

## FRANÇOIS LAGIRARDE

The ongoing publication of the inscriptions of northern Thailand allows relatively easy access to a considerable amount of information, well exploited by some historians and linguists, but still somewhat neglected by historians of literacy and literature.

Although major texts attributed to the 15th and 16th centuries largely dominate ancient literature, no known Thai manuscript of these distant epochs survived. The peak of manuscript culture is in the 19th century, while that of inscriptions is around the 16th century. Reading inscriptions ensures the validity, if not the facts, of acts of speech and language from the late premodern period and the early modern period. The time of recording was closer than the present to the instances and situations that supported and conceived such inscriptions.

The inscriptions of Lan Na evoke the history of books as objects, the stories they tell, and the subjects they address. But primarily they disclose the epigraphic habit itself as an act of literacy — rarely studied for its own sake. This chapter highlights the technical aspects of many inscriptions and uncovers what is told or reflected in the stone (or bronze) messages. The practical side is often concerned with land, property, and legal management of laborers, but the ultimate *raison d'être* is the rich sum of Buddhist references and literary practices quoted or mentioned in every inscription.

# Introduction

This article is a revised and slightly expanded version of "Buddhism, History, Literature, and the 'Epigraphic Habit' of Lan Na," presented at the ICTS13 in July 2017. The original paper was triggered by an enthusiastic reading of Ramsay MacMullen and opened with a quotation from his seminal article, "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire":[1]

> "We would have the heart of the matter if we knew why people wrote things on stone everywhere in Italy and the provinces. We must look not for the occasion chosen, such as a life ended, a vow made, or an honor voted, but at the decision itself to give those facts some marble commemoration." (MacMullen 1982, 233)

The critical point is the decision to select historical, ritual, and private facts and to record them rather briefly on a stone inscription for permanent public display. In the context of Lan Na epigraphy — mostly *semas* or stone slabs found in monasteries — such a record is called a "literacy event," generally performed for a specific Buddhist purpose but monitored by civil governing authorities, at least during the focal period between the 14th and the 17th centuries.[2] The word "religion" is used in its broadest social and spiritual sense; as shown later in this paper, the primary function of an inscription is to enact a religious ritual and publicize its official recognition. This enactment was provided by two internal administrations, the monastic authorities and the local civil authorities. Hence, the main question is what do we really know about this process of decision and enactment in the early history of Lan Na or in the Thai world at large?

Epigraphy was mostly a speech/writing act, balanced toward officials, ordinary people, monks, and even supermundane beings. It fits well with the words of Jack Goody considering diverse modes of communication: "between man and man, man and God, man and nature" (Goody 1977, 51). In Thai culture, this translates to people, Buddhas, and Dhamma. The epigraphic habit of Lan Na is above all an activity of literacy that is mainly informative and performative in terms of religious completion and spiritual achievement. This social activity was apparently well organized in the frame of a moral and legal agreement between the rulers and the Buddhist authorities. However, the most outstanding feature is that northern Thai epigraphy was deeply engaged in the promotion of all aspects of literacy and therefore pertains to the historical transition between an oral but "literate" original Thai/Tai culture to a full writing culture.[3]

## General background

In Lan Na, lithic and bronze inscriptions are the only remaining material evidence of literacy in Thai/Tai language and scripts, through artefacts dated between the 13th and 15th centuries. This is also the case in the neighboring and older cultures of Hariphunchai and Sukhothai, since no manuscripts survive from these periods and cultures. Lan Na adopted at least one major script from Sukhothai, an alphabet locally known as *fak kham* in which the majority of inscriptions were written.[4]

The oldest dated manuscript in the Tham Lan Na script is dated 1471, but it carries a Pāli text. We lack precise data about ancient Thai manuscripts in Thai language. To the best of my knowledge, the oldest has not been presented to the scientific community. Cataloged manuscripts are mostly dated between the 17th and 19th centuries (Lagirarde 2017, 280). This vacuum does not mean that written documents on fragile media (paper, palm leaf, wood, etc.) never existed, but just that they disappeared to be replaced, partially or totally, by new copies. There is no doubt that Lan Na literacy and literature developed solidly as early as the 14th century in several alphabets and several vernacular or classical languages (mainly Pāli, Sanskrit being represented only by borrowings or lexical derivations). Inscriptions remained, but not different manuscripts and books supporting major texts.

The epigraphic corpus of Hariphunchai consists of 20 inscriptions in Mon and Pāli (9 stones and 11 baked-clay tablets), apparently all dating from the 12th and 13th centuries.[5] The structure of the most important inscription (LB01 or Wat Don Kaeo)[6] incorporates general themes of future local epigraphy. Direct reference to books and literature reveals immediate concerns about literacy and textual awareness: "Ayant fait écrire de nombreux *tripiṭakas* dorés" (Cœdès 1925, 190–191, from the Pāli).[7] It also makes reference to epigraphy itself: "(1) Ceci est le récit véridique, inscrit sur pierre, des œuvres (2) faites par ma famille" and "(9) Voici le récit véridique de mes œuvres" (Halliday 1930, 90).[8] The rulers of Hariphunchai were well acquainted with the epigraphic habit — or the art of erecting stones. They probably transmitted the local Mon word meaning "written stone" (*selālekh*) to the newcomers (the Thai). If the word *silālek*, which actually derived from Sanskrit, Prakrit, or Pāli, survived in Lao, inscriptions are mostly known as *carik*, *carük*, or *carit* (จาริก, จารึก, จาริด). These words are of Khmer origin, deriving from the *cār* (จาร), which appears in Khmer epigraphy as early as the 10th century.[9]

Thai inscriptions are good direct or indirect indicators of the state of literacy in ancient Thai culture, even if the information provided is generally scattered or sketchy. The very first inscription (Ram Khamhaeng inscription, dated — though not unanimously — 1292, and considered an exceptional item) credits the invention of the Thai alphabet to the king himself, with a precise date of 1285, but does not provide many more details. The historical state of literacy can be only reconstructed by a comprehensive reading of all inscriptions in different Thai/Tai languages. No single record is comparable to the Pagan inscription dated 1442, which reported a donation to a monastery and included a list of almost 300 titles of different texts written in Pāli, Sanskrit, and Burmese (Luce 1976, 203–256).[10]

The various titles of the corpora published since 1924 clearly show uncertainties in the definition of the epigraphic genre itself and its historical limits. *Prachum Carük Sayam* (vols. 1 and 2) was started in 1924, followed by *Prachum Sila Carük* up to vol. 7, and then by a magnificent vol. 8, simply entitled *Prachum Carük*. Note the changes in the geopolitical frame (whether or not Siam is used) and the material support of the inscription (only stone or all supports). Different academic committees and people often self-limit corpora or parts of a project to a language, place, country, region, or period. For instance, graffiti and signatures, plates, terracotta, *ostraca*, seals, and inscriptions on wood and lacquer are not put on the same level as monumental stone inscriptions and inscriptions on the base of bronze Buddha images, so might not appear in many corpora. This is purposeful for historical reasons when a specific official epigraphic habit or tradition may need to be displayed, but it is not acceptable in terms of linguistics, as the reconstruction of a state of language (indexes, glossaries, and grammars) should run through all available documents.

Existing corpora impose their own definition of epigraphy: considering time or epoch, medium, and political geography. Today, two main corpora are available in the field of northern Thai or Lan Na studies: the *Lan Na Inscriptions* (LI) published by the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture, Bangkok, under the supervision of Prasert na Nagara (2 parts of 2 volumes each) and the *Corpus of Lan Na Inscriptions* (CLI) published under the direction of the late Hans Penth (15 volumes, one including inscriptions from Chiang Tung in Burma). A more recent study (not exactly a corpus) has been published by Marek Buchmann, who worked on a collection of 173 inscriptions in stone, dated from the origin (1339) up to 1616/1617 for his Glossary and 221 for his Catalog (BR, BY, JM, JR, LB, LP, MS, NN), plus 17 "inscriptions without a Fine Arts Department Registration Number." His selection was made according to: 1) place — geographical range, northern Thailand; 2) time — period, from the 14th to

17th centuries (except for the Catalog); and, 3) material support — stone only.

In the Catalog of 221 registered inscriptions (FAD) by Buchmann, 147 inscriptions are dated and 74 are not dated or not dated with certainty, although paleographic dating can be proposed for many of them. This dating is consistent with the list below.

14th century: 5 stone inscriptions
15th century: 66 stone inscriptions
16th century: 52 stone inscriptions
17th century: 2 stone inscriptions
18th century: 6 stone inscriptions
19th century: 10 stone inscriptions
20th century: 6 stone inscriptions

Lan Na epigraphy was born in the 14th century and reached its full habit during the 15th and the 16th centuries. It almost disappeared during the Burmese occupation and was humbly reborn during the new dynasty of Cao Cet Ton (founded by King Kawila and his six brothers) in the 19th century.

The purpose and intentions of northern Thai inscriptions are multiple: they incorporate numerous kinds of messages left between the late premodern and the early modern period on diverse material supports, selected for their resistance and durability. The corpus proposed by Buchmann, inscribed stone slabs, or *semas*, were generally public monuments posted on or next to other larger monuments. They belong to the category of relative inscriptions, and their messages had to be enduring, public, and voluntarily nonconfidential.

Griswold and Prasert na Nagara proposed a definition of Sukhothai epigraphic function, also relevant for the northern Thai realm: "The main purpose of practically all the Sukhodayan inscriptions, no matter how much additional information they may give, is to commemorate a ceremony which accompanied some specific act, such as the installation of a throne, an oath of friendship between two rulers, the promulgation of a law, the exoneration of a monk who had been falsely accused, the founding or dedication of a monastery or of a *cetiya*, *vihāra* or statue, or some other donation to religion." (From the introduction to "The Inscription of Văt Jāṅ Lòm (1384 AD)" in *Epigraphic and Historical Studies*, No. 8, 1992, 221–222). This rather traditional definition makes interesting points about the complexity of epigraphic facts: 1) writing, 2) about a ritual or a ceremony, 3) associated to some "historical" act, or 4) in commemoration. One main question pertains to the meaning of "commemoration," on top of all the strong symbolical actions (ceremony and text composition). Is this part of a peculiar reading of the inscriptions? It is also important to understand the association between "act," or the ordinary original event, and its ritual (religious) backing. This first point, "writing," is not as simple as it appears, as discussed later in this article. The erection of public inscriptions is sometimes a communication, a ritual of second generation, or at least a process well regulated, celebrated, or recalled by the inscription. The reflexivity (the inscription speaks of the inscription) is a fundamental and unique aspect that allows us to understand the state of productive literacy at a time when, unfortunately, receptive literacy remains unclear.

It is a general truth that writing (in this case a command carried out by officials engraved in stone or bronze at great expense,) is followed by reading. It is unclear what readership was anticipated and even if any (human) reading was really ever expected.[11] Who would read inscriptions that were written in an alphabet that was not taught universally in monastic schools? In Thai domains, the historical evolutionary relationship between literacy and illiteracy remains unknown, at least as far as the older period is concerned. Lan Na inscriptions can be assumed to be designed for future readers. Generations of dignitaries would have full or partial control over land and men as a direct result of inscriptions that served as land deeds or legal acts that roughly organize, more than proper religious activities, the maintenance of property. These legal documents (records, certificates, or charters) were possibly not generally meant to be read in an ordinary way, but consulted in case of problems linked to the evolution of society. As such, inscriptions represent archives to be read in case of disagreement. Their readership, at the time of their composition, was envisioned as future, collective, and undetermined.

In addition to the law as decreed by a king or a governor and transmitted to officials, meritorious acts performed in full knowledge of the Dhamma and under the law of Karma are also often mentioned. A readership of the votive words comprising the faithful seeking to become a future Buddha or to be reborn in a higher condition seems absurd. Although there is no one to receive the message, its production, writing, and carving is a ritual action as important as the commemorated good deed.

The distinction between the original event (construction of a monastery or specific building, gilding of a statue, etc.) and the writing of its narrative have been intentionally distinguished in nature and time. That is one reason why some inscriptions bear two different dates or even two different horoscopes, such as JR02, LB23, or JR63. The first date is the date of the event; the second date refers to the day the inscription was engraved or erected (not necessarily the day when the royal order was promulgated). In JR02, December 28, 1495, commemorates the gilding of Phra Cao Ton Luang; but June 26, 1495, on the right of the same side records the installation of the stele. Six months were necessary to compose the text and engrave it on the stone slab. In JR63, two years (1497 to 1499) elapsed between the construction of a monastery and the promulgation of the legal text.

## Literacy and literature

Stone and bronze inscriptions from Lan Na show important material differences in the cut, the cast, and in the quality of lettering. "Stone inscriptions" generally means "stone slabs," as inscriptions in rock are very rare in the region; slabs were portable in size and were moved, removed, and even reused as palimpsests or for such other uses as sharpening stones. The general style varies considerably, although texts, condensed for obvious material reasons, almost always appear quite prosaic (versification, such as in JM24, is rare). Inscriptions generally follow the style of Buddhist oral composition and transmission and frequently use the vocative mode. By calling attention to a message in a verbal style, inscriptions begin to provide a simple definition of the state of literacy at a time when it shared common ground with orality.

For example, LB16A02–04 (dated 1487) starts with an invitation to listen to stories, (official) articles, and narratives (following in the inscription), as they are the special bases of meritorious actions (*puñña-kiriyā-vatthu*). Moreover, this is the instruction of the king:[12]

> ๑.๒. . . . ดูกราสาธุนิกรทั้งหลา-
> ๑.๓. ย จุ่งฟังนิยายสายสาร ตำนานบุญกิริยาวัตถุอันพิเศษ เป็นอุป-
> ๑.๔. เทศพระเป็นเจ้าเจ้าแผ่นดิน . . .
>
> **My translation:**
> "(1.2.) Ho you all virtuous people! (1.3.) Listen to the stories, reports, and chronicles supporting special merit-making as they (1.4.) are instructed by the king, the lord of the land."

The vocabulary of text typology is particularly rich (*niyai, saisan, tamnan, upadesa*) and seems to underline the distinction between and distribution of legal commands (*saisan* and *upadesa*) and narratives (*niyai* and *tamnan*). These executive and literary elements are substantiated by a quotation regarding the Buddhist Pāli concept of *puñña-kiriyā-vatthu* or "grounds for merit-making," consisting at least three kinds of actions: *dānā* (giving), *sīla* (moral conduct), and *bhāvanā* (development and spiritual cultivation).[13]

Another inscription from Chiang Tung (the Chaimontaram inscription) provides much information about literary facts and functions. After the inscription mentions *tamnan* and *san/sāra* (face 2, 1), the text explains that the queen was busy decorating the relics casket containing the ashes of the king. Then she ordered paintings depicting the life of the Buddha with caption inscriptions.

> ๓.๕. . . . แกวแลวกทำใหคำลำดบั .
> ๓.๖. (อนัเหนือนัใต) มีแผนรินสิลาเปนเ . . .
> ๓.๗. (ปรดิด) ดวยคำกทำนิยายอนัพิจิตฺร . . .

> **Translation by Prasert and Griswold** (EHS 19, 752):
> "then she had words (of explanation inscribed) in sequence; [above and below], there were stone slabs . . . [set up] with words relating the stories in detail . . ."

The queen refers to episodes in the life of the Buddha, especially his teaching of the books of the Abhidhamma. Then the author of the inscription[14] mentions the quantity of *niyay* (fabulous narratives) illustrated (idem, 752).

> ๓.๑๖. . . . การเมือพระเจาไพเทสนาอะ
> ๓.๑๗. พิธำมะสตะปะกรนำ . . .
> ๓.๒๐. แลตำพรำมีนิญายหลายพรายงาม

> **Translation by Prasert and Griswold** (EHS 19, 752):
> "the scene when the Lord went to preach the seven Pakaraṇas of the Abhidhamma . . ." and "there were many beautiful stories, all complete."

Epigraphy thus often mentions the narrative genre and, in particular, the traditional chronicles (*tamnan*), some of the most represented texts in manuscript culture, just after the *Jātakas*. More precisely, epigraphy presents contents known from manuscripts engraved between the 17th and the 20th centuries. However, we still do not understand exactly whether these contents are quotations of texts already written or abstracts or "pre-texts" well known in the oral tradition. Lan Na inscriptions are the first medium for vernacular literary material to be composed, edited, transmitted, and eventually published much later.

One of the most developed themes in the *tamnan* of Lan Na is the travel of the Buddha in the future cultural and political space of the Tai (the Tai Yuan, the Tai Khün and the Tai Lü). In many stories, the Buddha selects specific sites (for their future religious potentiality, but also for their history in the eras of Buddhas of the past) and leaves body relics such as hair or footprints (*buddhapāda*). These are supplemented with new body relics, after the *Parinibbāna*, finally to be rediscovered by meritorious Tai people who settled and/or took command well after these events (around the 13th century). This theme appears several times in epigraphy, confirming the relative antiquity of this stock of legends and the obvious will of their authors to grant the legitimacy of an exceptional history and a high culture of writing to the territory and its most recent occupants. It is one way to infer that the land has been prepared to welcome the Buddhist institution — or law — to match the law of the Tai rulers.

The damaged LB17A10–14, dated 1611 or 1612, recalls the basics of this narrative: "When the Lord Buddha with other Arahanta Cao came to this mountain, he mentioned to Cao Ananda that . . . at this mountain, all Buddhas of this Bhadra Kappa . . . is established by each Buddha . . ." (LI II, I, 306–307, 434). Hans Penth proposed a slightly more elaborate summary: "The Buddha Gotama once came through the air to this hill. He said to Ānanda: 'All (five) Buddhas of this Bhaddakappa come to his hill and make a prediction concerning their (relics being enshrined here in the future)' . . ." (CLI 3, 239).

๑๐. . . . เมื่อพระเจ้าโคตมะมาโผดบริษัท
๑๑. ทั้งหลายด้วยลำดับมาเถิงม่อนดอยที่นี้เหมือนดังกระชิง
๑๒. จิ่งลงมาจากอากาศด้วยอรหันตาเจ้าทั้งหลาย พระจิ่งปลง
๑๓. ญานเล็งดู จิ่งจากับเจ้าอานนท์ จิ่งว่าดูราย . . .
๑๔. ดอยที่นี้พระเจ้าทั้งหลายเกิดมา (ใน) ภัทรกัปนี้ . . .

> **My translation:**
> "(10.) When the Buddha Gotama came to show mercy to his followers, (11.) all of them, in good order he reached this mountain in a procession (12.) then he came down from the sky with all his arahant disciples. The Buddha then had (13.) a vision [of the past] that he told to Ananda with these words: "Ho . . . (14.) on this mountain [came] all the Buddhas of this Bhaddakappa . . ."

JR06 or "The inscription of the hermit Vajamariga" (dated 1605) bears the most valuable text referring to a precise *tamnan*, here the history of Doi Tung (*Tamnan Phra That Doi Tung*). It is an untypical digraphic bronze inscription on the base of a *rüsi* image, now in the Chiang Saen Museum. Unfortunately, the inscription is badly damaged and only a partial and conjectural translation is possible. I propose to read two different sections of the inscription (B03–05 and C01–03) from LI1,1, 15–16. A larger translation of "bits and pieces of text" has been proposed by Penth (1993, 70–71), who observes that the oldest manuscript of the *Tamnan Doi Tung* is dated 1812 (idem, 59). Penth assumes that the inscription is evidence of an intermediate version of the text based on readings of the *Mahāvaṃsa* (composed in Sri Lanka), the "extended" *Mahāvaṃsa* (composed in Burma or Thailand?) and the *Tamnan Müang Yong*, the chronicle of the Tai Lü from the Eastern Shan States of Burma.

B ๓. . . . (ดู)กรา มาริสะทั้งหลาย จักกล่าวตำนานธาตุเจ้า
B ๔. หินก้อนหนึ่ง มีพื้นร(าบ) . . . สฐานดังหมาก . . . (เอา)ไว้นั้น ติดปากถ้ำ
ช้างเผิก ธาตุมี ๖

B ๕. . . . นิทาน . . .
C ๑ ๐ ลูกชาวสากยะ ๖ ตน . . . ดอยปู่เจ้า เป็นต้น พระเจ้าไพลวงอากาศ นั่งเหนือหินหมากนาว ตัด พระเจ้าหื้ออา-
C ๒ นนท์ตักน้ำมาฉันแล้ว เป็นดังพระเจ้าทำนวายไว้นั้นแล เมื่อลูน เจ้าจร[15]เดินเอาข้าวบิณฑิบาตเมิงยวน ฉันข้าวแล้วอยู่เ
C ๓ ปีนสุข

**My translation:**
"(B3.) . . . Listen all of you, here is told the story (*tamnan* [Phra That Doi Tung]) of the relic(s). (B4.) A rock with a lemon shape . . . blocks the entrance of Chang Phüak Cave. There are 6 relics . . . (B5.) the story (*nidāna*) . . . (C1.) the disciples of the Sākya [?] . . . Doi Pu Cao. The Lord [Buddha] came by air: he sat on a lemon-shape rock and ordered (C2.) Ananda to give him some water. Then he made a prediction [about a future cetiya containing his relic] before going for alms in Müang Yuan, he ate his food and rested (C3.) with satisfaction."

Other inscriptions touch on the special topic of the traditional Buddhist chronicles and the discovery and installation of relics of the Buddha. Possibly JM15B13–15 (1581) refers to — or indirectly recalls the theme of — the most popular *tamnan* of Lan Na, the *Tamnan Takong Hongsawadi* (or Shwe Dagong). Other texts, such as the *Tamnan Phra Cao Liap Lok*, could also be implied. The inscription has deteriorated badly, but these words are legible:

๒.๑๓. . . . ลุกยังหงสา
๒.๑๔. . . . ทูนพระธาตุ . . . มาเป็น
๒.๑๕. . . . เสด็จพระเกศเจ้า . . .

**Translation from LI 2, 1, 405:**
"the hair of the Buddha was taken back from Hangsavati."

JM20A04-06, known as the Culagīrī inscription (or Culakhiri, dated 1554), starts with a short narrative (according to the reading of LI 2, 1, 78) about King Mekuti thinking of the *tamnan* of the relic at Culagiri. This relic was installed by (the queen) Camathewi (Cāmadevī) several centuries before on the top of a small mountain.[16] An alternate reading by Penth proposes that the king, passing next to the reliquary, saw the gold of the monument and remembered the story of Camathewi.[17] Both cases suggest a textual tradition: a *tamnan* of the relic at Culagirī or the chronicle of Camathewi (*Cāmadevīvaṃsa*).

๑.๔. . . . พระเป็นเจ้าตนเป็นธรรมิก(รา) ชาธิราช
๑.๕. รำเพิงเห็นตำนา(นพระธา) ตุเจ้าในจุลคิรี
๑.๖. . . . (เมื่)อนางจามเทวีได้มาฐาปนาไว้

**My translation:**

"(1.4.) . . . the king who is a king according to the Dhamma above other kings (*dhammikarājadirāja*) (1.5.) thinks of the *tamnan* of the relic(s) at Culakhiri(1.6) . . . when Nang Camathewi came to install them."

## Epigraphy: A literacy event

*Carik*, *carük*, or *carit* (จาริก, จารึก, จาริด) belong to the epigraphic vocabulary. They are used when inscriptions mention their own existence. These terms can either refer to the stone slab or to the message or text engraved in the stone. Stone/monumental inscriptions frequently refer to themselves, but it is rarely the case with other types of inscriptions.

The classifiers for *carik*, *carük*, and *carit* can be *hin*, *pang*, *sema*, *phaen*, and *lak* (หิน ปาง เสมา แผ่น หลัก). As mentioned above, *carük* is often qualified with the words *sela/sila* (stone). Sometimes *sema* (*sīmā*) is used by itself as a noun meaning a boundary stone (of the monastic land or the ordination hall). It is difficult to understand with certainty what is meant:

the text inscription, the ritual stone (*bai sema*), or a boundary marker of the Saṅgha property (*pāda sema*). For example, in JM24A07–08 (LI II, I, 92–93), an imprecation is launched against anyone who comes to interfere with the *sema*:

> ๑.๗. . . . คนใดมากวนแลลวนเสมา ตา-
> ๑.๘. ยลงเป็งจาจุ่งต้องอเวจี . . .
>
> My translation:
> "(1.7.) Any person, who will come and do something inappropriate to this *sema* (1.8.) will [fall] into the Avecī hell at his death."

The issue is the different status conferred to the stone slabs, from special to holy or sacred. For example, the famous Wat Phra Yün inscription calls itself a *phra sela carik* (modern Thai: พระศิลาจารึก; LB38, I–2) related to or owned by king Song Saen Na. (It is also considered a Sukhothai inscription, dated 1370.) The use of *phra* seems to confer an elevated status to the stone slab, but it seems to be a unique occurrence in both Lan Na and in Sukhothai.[18]

However, the erection (planting in the ground) of an inscription is seen usually as a solemn act of merit (Thai: *bun*; Pāli: *puñña*) that will be dedicated to the king in the Buddhist local tradition (JM04A09–12, 1497):

> ๑.๙. . . . หื้อช่างดาบเรินผู้หนึ่งชื่อ
> ๑.๑๐. ขาวน้อย นำมาฝังจาริดไว้ เพื่อหื้อเป็น
> ๑.๑๑. บุญจำเริญแก่พระเป็นเจ้าแผ่นดินแ-ล
>
> **My translation:**
> "(1.9.) order was given to an official (*chang dap rüan*) called (1.10.) Cao Noi, to come and bury this inscription to make (1.11.) merit to the king, lord of the land."

The same solemnity features in JM16A03–05 (1496), when the Mahasami Yanavilasa transfers the merit for establishing Wat Si Bun Rüang to the king:

> ๓. . . . มหาสามีญาณวิลาสเจ้าตน
> ๔. มีประหญาฉลาดอาจในปริยัติศาสนาหื้อเอาวัดศรีบุญ
> ๕. เริงนี้ มาถวายส่วนบุญแก่พระเป็นเจ้า . . .
>
> **My translation:**
> "(3.) . . . Mahasami Yanavilasa the master (4.) who is wise and clever in the study of the [Buddhist] texts and the religion [of the Buddha] orders this Wat Si Bun (5.) Rüang to transfer all the merit obtained [in its establishment] to the king."

A review of some example of Sukhothai epigraphy may be useful to understand the literacy situation in Lan Na. In Sukhothai, epigraphy clearly shows that the establishment of an inscription was not an isolated act, but belonged to a communication system incorporating cross-referenced messages. Inscription no.3, Nakhon Chum II–47–48, makes a clear distinction between a message, a statement, a word (*kham*), and the support itself. It suggests that a single message can be detailed (*phisadan*) and supported in other inscriptions. From *Prachum Carük* 8:

> ๒.๔๗. . . . คำนี้กล่าวคันสเล็กสน้อย แลคำอั-
> ๒.๔๘. นพิสดารไซร้ กล่าวไว้ในจารึกอันมีในเมืองสุโขทัย . . .
>
> **Translation by Griswold and Prasert na Nagara (EHS, 464):**
> "This statement (คำ) is rather brief, but there is a detailed inscription at Sukhothai."

This is not surprising because the erection of an inscription was often, if not always, a royal commission that involved well-coordinated teamwork. Inscription 8, Carük Khao Sumanakūṭa (around 1370, the same date as PB38, the first royal inscription of Lan Na), also tells of the King responsible for this inscription. *Prachum Carük* 8:

> ๔.๑๔. . . . จึงขึ้-
> ๔.๑๕. นมานบพระบาท
> ๔.๑๖. ลัษณอันตนหา-
> ๔.๑๗. กประดิษฐานแต่ก่-
> ๔.๑๘. อนเหนือจอม
> ๔.๑๙. เขาสุมนกูฏนี้ จึง
> ๔.๒๐. จารจารึกอันนี้ไว้
> ๔.๒๑. อีกโสด

> Translation by Cœdès (*Prachum Carük Sayam*, 129):
> "Alors il monta rendre hommage à la sainte empreinte du pied que son père avait placée autrefois sur le sommet de cette montagne Sumanakūṭa, puis il grava cette nouvelle inscription."[19]

Inscription 45, dated 1392, records oaths of loyalty between high ranking people in Sukhothai, as well as imprecations against wrongdoers. The word *carük* is used twice: the first occurrence (I–33) tells of the "message engraved in this inscription" (สารจารในจารึกนี้); and the second (II–15) "curse the bad people in this inscription on a stela" (สาบานว่าร้ายในเสมาจารึกนี้), or Griswold and Prasert, EHS 3, 89: "we pledge in this inscribed stone slab that the wicked . . ." Interestingly, this inscription mentions the dignitaries who composed the text and even the inspirers or sponsors. Griswold and Prasert (EHS 3, 88) proposed this translation (I/32–37.): "If anyone wishes to complain, asking what dignitaries composed the text set forth in this inscription, it was Saṃtec Braḥ Mahāthera Saṅgharāja Rattṇavaṅścārya and Braḥ Mahāthera Dharrmaseṇāpati on behalf of the Cau Braña who is the Grandson, and Mahā . . . and Mahāthera Sumedha [on behalf of the Grandfather?] . . . all of them . . ."

The expression *san can carik* appears verbatim in inscription 64, also known as Nan 01 (NN01A04) "Kham Pu Sabot" (The inscription Recording the Oath of the Grandfather, studied by Griswold and Prasert na Nagara in EHS 3, 67–107). Almost the same expression *san* (*sār*) *carik* can be found in inscription 106, or Wat Chang Lom inscription, and in the inscription dated 1451 from Chiang Tung (face B, 1), published by Griswold and na Nagara (EHS 19) and Penth (Chaimontaram AD 1451).

The difference between the stone and the text is clearly demonstrated in 14 (I–35–37, Wat Khema, dated 1536), studied and translated by Cœdès and by Griswold and Prasert. The first reading can be found in *Prachum* 1, 167; the second in EHS 15, 645; and the third one in *Prachum* 8, 282–283:

๑.๓๕. . . . // หิน
๑.๓๖. แผ่นนี้ นายพันพิษณุกรรมให้ แล นายสังลูก นายเทพไชยรับ
๑.๓๗. . . . ให้เป็นจารึกไว้ ให้มั่นกับศาสนาพระเป็นเจ้า // . . .

**Translation by Griswold and Prasert (EHS 15, 653):**
"This piece of stone was given by Nāy Băn Bisṇukarma and Nāy Săṅ, the son of Nāy Debajaya, undertook . . . To have it inscribed so that [the record] may last as long as the Buddha's religion."

**Translation by Cœdès:**
"Cette pierre-ci a été donnée par Nāy Băn Bisnukarma, et Nāy Săṅ, fils de Nāy Deba s'est chargé . . . d'en faire une inscription pour qu'elle subsiste dans la religion du Buddha."[20]

Obviously, stone is seen as the favorite material for messages intended to last the 5,000 years of the *sāsanā* and presence (in the relics) of the Buddha.

Sometimes inscriptions tell of the life of the inscription itself, such as Sukhothai no.15 (Wat Phra Sadet, the 4th side dated 1525). The inscription was broken, re-used, and re-written at a later date: the latest edition mentions or recalls an earlier message. Reading from *Prachum* 8, 485–486:

๔.๒๒. . . . โดยมีในจารึก
๔.๒๓. สันด้านแตกอั้น
๔.๒๔. ให้ลิ้นต่อเท่ากรรมา
๔.๒๕. วสาน . . .

**Translation by Griswold and Prasert, EHS 16, 674:**
"as was stated in [this] inscription in the upper part which is [now] broken off, in which the slaves were given unconditionally for the rest of their lives."

In JM67A09–12 (from Wat Mahawan in Phayao, dated 1489), the queen (Mahādevi/Mahathewi) orders four different officials to organize the installation (possibly to create the edition of the text) of an inscription for the dedication of the monastery she has been sponsoring. The merit is for the king and for herself.

๙. เจ้าหมื่นน้อยในมหาเทวีเจ้าจิ่ง หื้อมาฝังจารึกไว้ หื้อเจ้าพั-
๑๐. นหลวงสุวรรณรังการหื้อฝัง หื้อพันหนังสือสินผระหญากับ
๑๑. พันข่ม(จ)อมมาสู่เจ้าหมื่น(อ)อ้ยฝัง บุญทั้งมวลนี้
๑๒. จุ่ง จำเริญแก่พระเป็นเจ้าเจ้าแผ่นดิน . . .

**My translation:**
"(9.) Mahathewi orders an official [of *cao mün* rank] called Noi to install the inscription. She orders an official (10.) [of *phan luang* rank] called Suwanna to be his deputy in the installation. She orders an official [of *phan nangsü* rank] called Sinphanya and (11.) an official [*phan*] Khom to come and join *cao mün* Noi to install [the inscription]. All the merit (12.) should benefit the king, the lord of

> the land . . .” [Later the text mentions that the merit should go also to the Mahathewi.]

Inscription JM16A21 (dated 1491) records work on the establishment of a monastery by a senior monk, Mahasami Yanavilasa. He offers the merit to the king, who orders Phuak Yana Khamhaeng to erect an inscription:

> ๒๑. . . . พวกญาณคำแหงแถมรับอาชญาพระเป็นเจ้าหื้อมาฝังจารีดไว้

The verb *fang* (ฝัง) was widely used and may have referred to the fact that the foot of the inscription was buried or permanently installed in a base of wood or concrete: *fang* should be simply translated “to erect” or “to erect permanently” (LB16A20, 1487: ฝังจาริดไว้). As the size of the stelae is always modest, this burying can be referred to simply as an installation.[21] The less-precise expression *sai carïk (carit) wai* (ใส่จาริดไว้, JM09A06) also appeared. Again, the nuance is a desire for permanence or eternity for the inscriptions, albeit against the interests of powerful people. An injunction about this inscribed stone is expressed well in JM67B10–11:

> ๑๐. . . . เจ้าไ-
> ๑๑. ทยผู้ใด มากินเมิงนี้ อย่าเอาออก แด
>
> **My translation:**
> “Any [future] governor who would take control over this *müang* should not remove it [from the monastery].”

The erection of an inscription was certainly witnessed by a group invited or summoned by the king or by a high ranking official: “people come to erect a stone inscription in the Banpan monastery following the order of the king; [10 families are listed] so do not interfere with the order." (BY89A16–20, 1496):

๑๖. . . . ข้าคนเจ้าหมื่นสามลานมาฝังหินจารึ-
๑๗. ก ในวัดบ้านปาน พันนาแซตา ตามอาชญา
๑๘. พระเป็นเจ้าแลมหาเทวีเจ้า แลยายพระเ-
๑๙. ป็นเจ้าหื้อไว้คนกับวัดสิบครัวไผอย่ากลั้วอย่า
๒๐. เกล้า ตามอาชญาพระหื้อไว้หมื่นกับอ้ายเ-

**My translation:**
"(16.) . . . Servants of an official [of *cao mün sam lan* rank][22] came to install the stone inscription (17.) in Wat Ban Pan, *Phan Na Seta* [possibly a person's name] followed the order (18.) of the king, the Mahathewi and the grandmother of the (19.) king, who command to leave ten families to [the service of ] the monastery. Do not tamper (20.) and follow the order delivered to the official (*mün*) . . ."

Usually the place of the installation of a stone slab is not mentioned. I found one exception in JR02 (1496) that first uses the word *carik* with the horoscope recording the erection of the stone (ฝังจารึก, JR02AR02). The other side provides details about the way the inscription should be kept, probably in the *wihan* alongside a large seated Buddha image. Reading from JR02B05:

๒.๕. หื้อต้องจารึกไว้ห้องพระเจ้าตนหลวง.

**My translation:**
"[the queen] orders to inscribe and leave [the inscription] in the room of the big Buddha."

## Literacy and law

One of the most common messages in Lan Na inscriptions names and lists witnesses, usually officials who are supposed to act as guarantors to enforce the order written in the stone. This order usually ends with a list of names of slaves and servants assigned to the monastery (necessarily from another owner or other property). The final document is very factual and down to earth. Nevertheless, it builds up a style or a literacy genre. In LB26A03 (dated 1500, published in CLI 6, 53–68), the queen orders the burial of the inscription in Wat Mahapho and the provision of 72 families of Yang people (possibly Karen):

> ๑.๓. พระมหาเทวีเจ้าอยู่หัว หื้อฝังจารีตไว้ในวัดมหาโพธิเจ้า
> ๑.๔. (ให้จัด) ชาวญาง ๗๒ ครัว (ไว้) กับ (วัดมหาโพธิ ดังนี้).
>
> **My translation:**
> "(1.3) Mahathewi, the queen, orders the installation of the inscription in Wat Mahapho (1.4) [and assigns] 72 families of Yang people to [the monastery]."

The main point concerns the respect embodied in two properties: land and people (slaves, servants). That is why so many dignitaries — governors, *cao mün*, and *thao* — are invited to come and bury an inscription. As seen above, the expression มาฝังจารึกนี้แล is standard and occurs in several inscriptions, such as LP12B08 (1496) and BY06A05–06, in which the Phra Pen Cao Cao Müang Chiang Rai (the governor of Chiang Rai) summons three officials to come and install the inscription in Wat Nang Mün (หื้อมาฝังจาริตไว้กับวัดนางหมื่น) to guarantee independence of the donated persons from other government duties. See also JM24A08 (dated 1505, also known as JM175 in LI II):

๑.๘. . . . หื้อมาฝังจารึกไว้คน
๑.๙. (สิ)บครัว หื้อรักษาพระพุทธเจ้ายังวัดอุทุพรอา-(ราม)[23]

**My translation:**
"(1.8.) I . . . order to install the inscription mentioning (1.9.) the 10 families, order to take care of the Buddha of Wat Uthuphonaram."

A king can even order (via a *cao mün*) the installation of an inscription and stipulate that his law be respected by subsequent generations of kings for the rest of the Buddhist era. BY38A02–07 (undated, 16th to 17th centuries):

๒. พระเป็นเจ้า . . .
๓. หื้อฝังจาริดในวัดด . . . ง
๔. ลาง หื้อ มั่น ต่อเท่าศา(สนา)พระ . . .
๕. เจ้า ๕๐๐๐ ปี เจ้า (แ)ผ่นดิน
๖. ผู้ใดอย่าเบียดเบียนเข(าใช้ส)อยเขาหมู่
๗. นี้ [. . .]

**My translation:**
(2.) The King . . . (3.) orders to install the inscription in Wat D . . . g (4.) to last until the end of the religion of the Buddha (5.) for 5,000 years. Any [future] king, lord of the land (6.) should not annoy or use this group [of people].

In LB23B01–19 (1489), the erection of an inscription is seen as the reunion of officials and high ranking monks as witnesses. It comes two days after an important donation by the queen. Accordingly, two horoscopes are provided, one for the donation and the second for the erection of the inscription. The queen calls for an assembly to witness the erection and to give (possibly written) permission (อนุญาต)[24] to a *rāja paṇḍita* to accompany other senior monks in establishing the boundary stones of the monastery (*sīmā*) according to the donations. The *paṇḍita* is the person who notes the decree to divide the land into two zones (*gāmakhetta* คามเขต). This could be stated in the inscription or another document written on a lighter support. Penth proposed a detailed explanation of "the technical terms in connection with the premises for the ordination of the monks" (1994, 173–176). He asserts that the inscription insists on the *baddhasīma*, which marks the inner and outer limits of the *ubosot*, creating two different zones to respect. This is a modern Thai reading of the inscription (LI II, 1, 327):

๒.๑. . . . อันมา
๒.๒. ชุมนุมกันฝังจาริดปางนี้เป็นประธาน
๒.๓. ว่ามหาพุกามเจ้าแลมหาสามีศรีสุนันทะ
๒.๔. กัลยาณะกับทั้งราชบัณฑิตรู้
๒.๕. แล ถัดนั้นพันนาหลังเชียงน้อยก็รู้แสนเขาสอยก็รู้
๒.๖. ร้อยนาหลัง ล่ามหมื่นก็รู้ ลำพันคำคอมก็รู้
๒.๗. คนทั้งหลายในเมิงควกนี้รู้ชู่คนแล แล
๒.๘. พระมหาพุกามเจ้าตนชื่อมหาญาณมังคลเจ้า
๒.๙. อันอยู่ในอารามเชียงเริกที่เรินพ่อพระ
๒.๑๐. มหาราชเจ้า ตนชื่อพระศรีธรรมราชนัดดา
๒.๑๑. นั้นขออาชญาแห่งมหาราชเทวีก็ปลงคดี
๒.๑๒. ลงคำแก่ราชบัณฑิตชื่อญาณวิสารทะ
๒.๑๓. หื้อมากับมหาพุกามเจ้า ก็จิ่งชุมนุม
๒.๑๔. ชาวเจ้าสังฆะทั้งหลายเป็นต้นว่ามหาสา
๒.๑๕. มีศรีสุนันทะกัลยาณะ หากผูกพั
๒.๑๖. ทธสีมานี้ไว้ในวัดข่วงชุมแก้วนี้
๒.๑๗. แล พัทธสีมาอันนี้เมื่อจักผูกนั้นราชบัณฑิต
๒.๑๘. หากกดหื้อเป็นคามเขต ๒ อันแล เจ้าภิก
๒.๑๙. ขุทั้งหลายเมือหน้าอย่าสงสัยใน . . . นี้เทอญ

**My translation:**
"(2.1.) . . . who came (2.2.) to get together in order to install this inscription are presiding [the event]. (2.3.) Maha Phukam, Maha Si Sunantha (2.4.) Kalayana and the royal pundits are witnesses [to this event] (2.5.) in addition, Phanna Lang Chiang Noi is a witness, Saen Khao Soi is a witness, (2.6.) Lam Mün is also a witness, Lam Phan Kham Kom is also a witness. (2.7.) Everyone in this Müang Khwak knows everybody. (2.8.) Phra Maha Phukam also called Mahayana Mangklao (2.9.) who stays in the Aram Chiang Rüak — next to the residence of the (2.10.) king. The king Phra Sri Thammarat (2.11.) has asked that the order of the Mahathewi should be proceeded (2.12) and redacted by the royal pundit called Yanawisantha. (2.13.) [This order] commands to come with Maha Phukam for a reunion of (2.14.) all the members of the Sangha, in particular Maha (2.15.) Sami Si Sunantha Kalayana to establish (2.16.) the boundary stones of this Wat Khuang Kaeo. (2.17) When these boundaries are installed (2.18.) the royal pundit should [note the] decree[25] to divide the land in two parts. All the (2.19.) monks in the future should not wonder about this."

Inscriptions mention who composed or ordered texts and who leads *in situ* in the monastery. This interactive network is described well in BY39A12–16 (Phayao, Wat Choi Sae, 1495), where we learn that a senior monk, through two officials, asks the queen to accept the merit for the construction of a monastery and provides slaves and land in support. In return, more officials, including one *paṇḍita*, receive an order bearing the permission of the king that should be engraved.

๑.๑๒. เจ้าหมื่น
๑.๑๓. น้อยใน เจ้าร้อยคำและเจ้าต้องแต้ม รับเอาคำพระม-
๑.๑๔. หาเทวีเจ้า แลพระมหาเทวีเจ้าปลงอาชญาแก่นา
๑.๑๕. พระเป็นเจ้า หื้อเป็นจาริกไว้[26]

> **My translation:**
> "(1.12.) the *cao mün* (1.13) Noi Nai Cao Roi Kham and Cao Tong Taem have received the word (1.14.) of Mahathewi. She lays an order about the rice fields of the King (1.15.) that should be written as an inscription."

BY39B11–13 concludes:
๒.๑๑. . . . เจ้าขุนผู้ใดก็ดี หากได้ กลั้วเก้ลา ก็ (ดี)
๒.๑๒. คนในจาริดนี้ ผู้นั้น เรียกว่าบ่ยำ อาชญาพระเ-
๒.๑๓. ปีนเจ้าแผ่นดินแล จาริดฝังในเดน [+ date]

> **My translation:**
> "(2.11.) any noble (*cao khun*) who interferes (2.12.) with the people [listed] in this inscription is considered as disrespectful of the order (2.13.) of the king. This inscription was erected on the month of . . ."

Interestingly, two dates are given in this inscription: the date of the first message from the senior monk (December 1495) and the date of the installation of the inscription three months later (February 1496).

Key words in this detailed record are *yam ājñā* (to respect a decree, a royal command). Hans Penth points out that King Mangrai (or his father) used a code of law, a *rājasattha* (Yuan version), established to rule "without contradicting the dharma" (Penth 2004, 61). In the inscriptions, the decree is called อาชญา (Thai: *atya* or *atnya*; Sanskrit: *ājñā*; Pāli: *āṇa*). This represents a royal order written by kings (and/or nobility) that is necessary to compose the (pre)text of the inscription. The inscriptions appear to be quoting or summarizing the initial decrees, but transcend their natural limits in a more narrative form.

Orders from the highest level are absolute. This explains why cursing and imprecations were due to anyone who was disrespectful of the inscription (the stone and the message), including important persons.

Such dignitaries are called *cao thai* (เจ้าไทย) in LB19B10–12 (1502 or 1506) and Penth CLI (vol. 6, 166–186, Wat Phaya Ruang):

> ๒.๙. . . . เจ้าไทยผู้-
> ๒.๑๐. ใดบ่ไว้คนในจารึกอันนี้ ตามอาชญาพระเป็นเจ้า
> ๒.๑๑. ตนเป็น(เค้า) แลหากมล้างเส้ [ = เสีย ] หื้อมันฉิบหายตา-
> ๒.๑๒. ยตกนรกฯ .
>
> **My translation:**
> "(2.9.) Whoever, among the high ranking people, (2.10.) does not leave the people [slaves or servants] in this inscription [= takes them away from their duty] under the order of the king, (2.11.) whoever, among those leaders, breaks or damages [this inscription], will meet with disaster, (2.12.) death and Hell."[27]

JR03A14–16 (1496) states that a decree or order has been passed, written on a golden plate (*lap kham*), assigning families of slaves and servants to Wat Prasat:

> ๑.๑๔. . . . พระเป็นเจ้าทั้ง
> ๑.๑๕. สองพระองค์ มีศรัทธา ปลงอาชญา หื้อ
> ๑.๑๖. หลาบคำมาไว้คนสิบครัว[28]
>
> **My translation:**
> "(1.14.) . . . Their majesties (1.15.) both of them [the king and his mother] having faith, have issued a decree ordering (1.16.) that a golden plate [should be written] mentioning 10 families of people."

A similar message is issued in BY02A05–06 (1488), in which the queen orders officials to bring a golden plate (*tra lap kham*) to the ruler of Phayao, or his wife, donating 20 families to the monastery and the Buddha image:

๑.๕. . . . หื้อเอา
๑.๖. ตราหลาบคำมาเถิงนางเมิงพญาว

**My translation:**
"(1.5. . . . order is given (1.6.) to present a golden plate to the Lady [ruler] of Müang Phayao."

Sarassawadee Ongsakul (2005, 118; and 274 in the Thai edition) provided pictures of a silver plate and seals (called หน้าจีด in northern Thai) from the reign of queen Wisutthithewi (1567). The royal seals and plate were given to the community around a monastery to exempt them from corvée labor. Apparently, a ceremony is still performed to celebrate this royal gift every three years. This celebration could be a new tradition or the original one. In the latter case, it could be an act of public reading reminiscent of 400 years ago.

Griswold and Prasert compared Sukhothai Inscription 45 (dated 1393) and NN01 (Inscription 64, date lost, possibly the same date as 45), which are two versions of a pact between Sukhothai and Nan. This is a rare function in the epigraphy of Lan Na. Interestingly, the two inscriptions are quite different from each other. This puzzled Griswold and Prasert: "perhaps both inscriptions had 'annexes,' such as inscribed gold sheets (*suvarṇapaṭra*), which were kept secret. Or perhaps there was one basic pact, followed later on by supplementary pacts . . ." (EHS 3, 77). NN01A04 has a tortuous but lyrical formula to express the commitment in writing:

ยวเกลียวสนิท อันแตกร้าวเข้าในสารจารจารึกนี้

**Translation by Griswold and Prasert (EHS 3, 98):**
"We who were separated [conjectural translation] are bound together and united in the text of this inscription."

Inscriptions sometimes recall older orders (donations of slaves/servants and land) and reconfirm their validity (such as LB10, dated 1496, according to Penth, CLI 06, 115). At the end of the 15th century, there was still a strong tradition of installing written stone slabs with some kind of ritual or ceremony possibly instituted for the event. The tradition later vanished; the text seems to warn people about this. LB10C16–17 mentions that a high ranking puṇḍit is ordered to bury a *sema*-shaped inscription to stand in accordance with ancient and former fashion. This inscription, permanently standing in the Prakham monastery, should last until the end of the 5,000 years of the sāsanā of the Buddha.

๓.๑๖. . . . ให้อุดมบัณฑิต
๓.๑๗. ริจหนาพิจิตรวาจา ขึ้นจารึกฝังเสมาให้
๓.๑๘. ไว้ตามโบราณ มีเมื่อก่อน ให้มั่นในวัด
๓.๑๙. พระคำ ต่อเท่าสิ้นศาสนาพระพุทธ
๓.๒๐. เจ้าห้าพันปี . . .

Another reading by Penth, et al. (CLI 06, 123):
ให้อุตตมบัณฑิต ริสสนาพิจิตรวาจาขึ้นจารึกฝังเสมา ให้ไว้ตามโบราณมีเมื่อก่อน ให้มั่นในวัดพระคำ ต่อเท่าสิ้นศาสนาพระพุทธเจ้า ๕๐๐๐ ปี

**My translation:**
"(3.16.) . . . orders a superior pundit (3.17.) to compose with a wonderful voice [the text] that will be supported by an inscription to be installed (3.18.) according to the tradition of the past. [This inscription] should be permanently [displayed] in Wat (3.19.) Phrakham until the end of the religion of the Buddha (3.20.) for 5,000 years."

We can conjecture the way an inscription was made: a *paṇḍita* or a local scholar, in possession of documents from the king or the authority in charge, would draft a full text and read it out to the *lapicide*, who would engrave it in stone with cutting tools. Unfortunately, the epigraphy provides few details about the making of an inscription or the people technically and intellectually involved.

One recurring point expressed in the texts is anxiety. It dwells on the fear of *saddhamma antaradhāna*, the disappearance of the true Dhamma. This is the final religious disaster predicted in Buddhist literature.[29] Epigraphy records fears of the disappearance of the records that guarantee transfers of merits and list all kind of donations. Such a mishap is perceived to jeopardize both the spiritual future of some actors and the social organization of the monastery. This fear is a real archetype found in Buddhist literacy since the 14th century (Sukhothai Inscription of Nakhon Chum or Nagara Jum, by Dharmarāja I, dated 1357); it has grown like a perennial quotation, as much for moral or metaphysical reasons as political and social grounds, especially after the Burmese conquest of Lan Na.

In 1496, the same year as LB10, an inscription from Lampang (LP06A13–17B01–02) explains a donation (in May) and the subsequent installation of an inscription (in June). A *cao saen*, a *cao mün*, and other witnesses had the royal order inscribed and installed permanently. The stela should stand until the end of the *sāsanā* of the Buddha; anyone who interfered with its installation would fall into the four places of suffering (*abāya*):

๑.๑๓. . . . รับอาชญาพระเป็นเจ้า
๑.๑๔. หื้อมาต้องจารีตฝังไว้ต่อเท่าสิ้-
๑.๑๕. นศาสนา ตราบใดศาสนาพระพุทธ
๑.๑๖. เป็นเจ้ายัง ผู้ใดหากเอาออก
๑.๑๗. (จา)กพระพุทธเจ้า อย่าหื้อมัน
๒.๑. มันยืน อบายทั้งสี่หื้อเป็นที่ไปแห่งมั-
๒.๒. นผู้เอาออกแด . . .

**My translation:**

"(1.13.) . . . have received the order of the king (1.14.) to come and install an inscription to last until the end (1.15.) of the religion, the religion of the Buddha. (1.16.) Whoever breaks it, takes it or removes it (1.17.) (from) the Lord Buddha will not (2.1.) have a long life, the four hells will be his [final] place. (2.2.)"

LB18A15–18 (1488) carries a similar message. Two officials are requested to bury an inscription in Weluwan *ārāma*. This inscription should last as long as the *sāsanā* of the Buddha and the order, both text and stone, should be protected:

๑.๑๕. . . . เจ้าล่ามหมื่นสุวรรณ เจ้าหมื่นน้อยคำ . . . หากรับคำมหา
๑.๑๖. เทวีเจ้าหื้อฝังจาริดอันนี้ เพื่อ (จัก) อารามอันนี้ มั่นต่อเท่า
๑.๑๗. ศาสนาพระเจ้าพัน(ปี) (ตำ)บลอันนี้อาชญามหาเ-
๑.๑๘. ทวีเจ้าหื้อไว้ . . . (ตา)มดังอั้น อย่าหื้อลิดหื้อมล้าง

**My translation:**

"(1.15. . . . *cao lam mün* Suwanna and *cao mün* Noi Kham have received the order from (1.16.) Mahathewi to install this inscription for this monastery. It should stand permanently (1.17.) for the thousands of years of the religion of the Buddha. This order (1.18.) from Mahathewi should remain in this place, do not take it away, do not destroy it!"

A final example confirms that lettering on stone had a higher status or supported higher expectancies than lettering on wood, a medium reserved for more mundane or extra-monastic purposes. The series of inscriptions on wood in the form of *semas* from Tham Den Ngua cave (LP42 to LP45) offers a short history of a royal order concerning a group called Khrao (คราว), possibly the officials who carried taxes from provinces to the royal treasury. The first order, issued in 1410 or 1470, stipulates that the district heads must not interfere with the work of the Khrao (no enforced transportation of heavy loads). A second inscription in 1491 invalidated an order given by a local public figure to supply grass for their horses and elephants and to carry heavy loads. The third inscription (LP44), dated 1506, confirms and clarifies the preceding message and indicates that the royal order shall be made public through inscription (or inscriptions should be placed everywhere). In the fourth (LP45), dated 1515, the author recalls that orders by his grandfather (Sam Fang Kaen), by Tilokarat (possibly his great-uncle), by his father, and by the current king (probably Phaya Kaeo) must always be respected and publicized in every *müang* through inscriptions. Such inscriptions were not designed to last forever, but they were intended for general display throughout the country and they were probably reproduced in series.

LP44 ๑.๑๓. . . . าเอาใส่จาริดไว้ขู่แห่งดีแล
LP45 ๑.๑๔. . . . จิ่งหื้อต้องเป็น
๑.๑๕. จาริดไว้ในคราวขู่เมืองฉันนี้แล

**My translation:**
LP44 "(1.1.13.) . . . install the inscription in every place!"
LP45 "(1.1.14.) . . . this order should be (1.15.) inscribed and kept among the Khrao in every *müang*."

## Conclusion

This short study is quite schematic and regretfully insufficient for a real understanding of the epigraphic habit of Lan Na. For example, a detailed map and a precise chronotypology of the inscriptions could tell us more about the evolution of epigraphic projects in time and space. More research is also needed in anthroponomastics, titulature, and hierarchical divisions to clarify chains of command and communication in the literate process.

The epigraphic habit of Lan Na was a means to communicate on many different topics. However, at its peak it was also deeply concerned with the donation and management of land (and the people responsible), especially in connection with the organization and life of Buddhist monasteries. When epigraphy concerns epigraphy itself, the theme is burying a monumental "signal" in the very land or soil provided by the landlord, who was, in theory, the king. The legal transfer of properties was conducted via a series of documents; the message posted on the *sema* was certainly the tip of an iceberg of utilitarian literature. The contemporary documents regarding preparation of the event and erection of inscriptions have disappeared. We are left with a limited portion of a larger communication process.

The crux of this process was the management of two systems of law and two *rāja* systems or hierarchies: the *cao pen din* lord of the land, king above the kings, and the *saṅgharāja* master of the community of monks or his equivalent.[30] These two systems had to meet, the Thai *sakdina* and the Buddhist *vinaya*. Transferring property from the Crown (eventually to a local noble or appointed person) to the Saṅgha was finally facilitated by accepting as valid the Buddhist code ruling on the boundaries of the area through the acts of the Saṅgha (*saṅghakamma*).

JM21B07–12 (1491) is a rare example that explains this process. It tells of the king of Chiang Mai (Phaya Yot Chiang Rai), who appointed a *mün dap rüan* to build a *vihāra* and a *cetiya* to cast five Buddha images and other artefacts. The king ordered the land for the monastery to be donated according to (or using) the Pāli formula provided by a commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*): *ayaṃ visuṃ gāmo hotu*, "may this be a place separate [from the rest of the land owned by the king]"). The following quotation is from the commentary of the Vinaya, the *Samantapāsādikā* (Sp V 1052). This expression became the name of official recognition of legitimacy of a monastery (known as "Royal *wisungkhamasima*").[31]

๒.๗. . . . ฐานนี้เจ้าอติชวญาณบวรสิทธิผู้เป็(น)
๒.๘. หมื่นดาบเรินนั้นขอแห่งพญาเจ้าตนชื่อศรีสั-
๒.๙. ทธรรมมังกุรมหาพรหมจักรวัดติราชาธิราชแล้-
๒.๑๐. วแล ศรีสัทธรรมมังกุรมหาบรมจักรวัดติรา-
๒.๑๑. ชาธิราชตัดหื้อเป็นคามเขตต่าง โดยคำม-
๒.๑๒. าในอรรถกถาว่า อยํ วิสุคาโมโหตุ นี้แล . . .

> **My translation:**
> "(2.7.) . . . For this place [the monastery], Cao Ati Java Yana Pavara Siddhi who is (2.8.) a *mün dap rüan* has asked permission from the king Si (2.9.) Sathathammangkura Mahaborom Chakrawati Ratchathiratcha (2.10.). Then the king Si Sathathammangkura Mahaborom Chakrawati Ratchathiratcha (2.11.) has ruled that it [the new monastery] should be a separate place using the formula (2.12.) from the Commentary: *ayaṃ visuṃ gāmo hotu.*

To publicize, in part, an already written act is an important function of inscriptions that is not restricted to legal content. Inscriptions actually are largely devoted to quoting and referencing literary sources, both from Pāli Buddhist scriptures and vernacular texts. The meeting and harmonization of these different facets of literacy stands as an incomplete and elementary definition of Lan Na epigraphy.

## Endnote: Northern Thai Epigraphy

1. This expression was reused or quoted in other contexts (Greece, India) by different specialists, such as Hedrick or Salomon, who reflected on this customary practice by questioning the usage first, rather than the message. The "rise and fall" of the epigraphic habit is seen as a "sign of some very broad psychological shift" in the Roman people for MacMullen, the Athenian epigraphical habit as a manifestation of state ideology (democracy) for Hedrick, and the uniqueness of Aśoka's time inscriptions reflecting the uniqueness of the ruler for Salomon.

2. In this article all dates are CE (Common Era).

3. *Literacy* refers to all human activities that involve the use of writing. This article highlights the production of the written word under its bureaucratic aspect for several types of data: administrative, legal, religious, moral, and literary.

4. For a useful general presentation of epigraphy in Southeast Asia, see Griffiths and Lammerts, 2015. For bronze inscriptions on Buddha images, see Griswold, 1957.

5. See Cœdès 1925 and Halliday 1930. Either paleographically datable (between the 11th and 12th centuries), or actually dated (1213 and 1219 for the "Vat Don" or Wat Don Kaeo inscription [LB01]). The influence of Old Mon on Thai has been demonstrated by Bauer (1993). For a new look at this corpus with lists and pictures, see Watson 2015.

6. LB = Lamphun. Similarly, BR = Phrae, BY = Phayao, JM = Chiang Mai, JR = Chiang Rai, LP = Lampang, MS = Mae Hong Son, and NN = Nan. For instance, LB17A12 means Lamphun Inscription 17, face A, line 12.

7. Cœdès: "Having ordered the writing of many golden *tripiṭakas*."

8. *1. II ° II vo' selālekh cramatt sambhār at 2. dnāt ey ma pa ° . . . 9. II ° II vo' selālekh cramat sambhār ey ma simo' savvādhi siddhi*; (1) "This is the true story, inscribed on stone, of the works (2) made by my family" and "(9) Here is the true story of my works." An identical formula is used in LB03A01 (Wat Mahawan) and LB06A01 (Wat Ban Luai): *vo' lekh cramatt sambhār* (Halliday 1930, 103). *Cramatt* is a dialectal variety of *cirmat* (= testimony, truth), here translated as "a true record" by Halliday (according to Prof. C. Bauer).

9. Oral communication according to Prof. M. Antelme. I found three Thai inscriptions using the compound ศิลาเลก. They are all from Isan and therefore belong to Lao culture. The oldest จารึกพระมหาพรหมเทโวโพธิสัตว์ (จารึกวัดบ้านริมท่าวัด is dated 1636 (National Library 1986, 245). However, the original spelling of the stele (สีลาเลคข) is intriguing. On one hand, there seems to be a discontinuous relationship between Hariphunchai and Lan Na (despite territorial sharing and the absorption of the former by the latter). On the other hand, there is an obvious proximity between Chiang Mai and Sukhothai, despite a real geographical distance. The adoption of Thai characters (*fak kham*) in Lan Na is immediate, whereas adoption of characters of Mon origin (Tham) apparently shifted (at a later date) to be specifically used for writing manuscripts.

10. Called *moau-kwan* "Record of Works of the Royal Monastery at Pagan." It mentions the cost of making copies, the name of the copyists, and the slaves given to the monastery (idem, 215).

11. A certain type of serial writing may agree with a mechanical reading, similar to the practice of prayer wheels of Tibetan Buddhism. The text of "prayers" could be regarded as statements of actions that set in motion the wheel of the law.

12. Quotations from the modern Thai transcription of Lan Na inscriptions generally follow the readings proposed in LI I,1 and LI II,1. Other sources are indicated (CLI or *Prachum*).

13. *Puñña-kiriya-vatthu* appears in at least in five main texts of the Pāli Canon and twice as the title of a Sutta, one in the *Itivuttaka* (It 3.2.1/51 f) and another one in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (A 8.36/4: 241–243).

14. The author is the Mahāthera Khemamaṅgala, who speaks at the third person but once uses the first person (เรา) to state that the king had "faith in my words" (face 2, 21).

15. จร = จอร (to go, to move on).

16. Ironically, this inscription was erected in the time of Thao Meku (1551–1564) or Phaya Mekuti, who was the last king of the Mangrai dynasty. In 1558, Chiang Mai fell to the Burmese. The king remained in power until 1564, when he was "removed" to Pegu (Sarassawadee 2005, 116). Queen Wisutthithewi ruled after him until 1578. After that date the Burmese were fully in control.

17. Penth reads (CLI 12, 34): ๕. รำพึงเห็น (ทอง) คำยังมหาธาตุเจ้าในจุลคีรี ๖. . . . เมื่อนางจามเทวีได้มาสถาปนาไว้

18. The oldest Thai inscription (Ram Khamhaeng Inscription or no. 1, III-22-24) does no refer to itself, but lists three other inscriptions, calling them simply *carik*. We are informed th "there is" (มี) one inscription installed (สถาบก) in the city of Chaliang and two in different caves (Phra Ram and Ratanathan): จาริกอันณึ่ง มีในเมืองชเลียง สถาบกไว้ด้วยพระศรีรัตนธาตุ จาริกอันณึ่ง มีในถ้ำ ชื่อถ้ำพระราม อยู่ฝั่งน้ำสำพาย จาริกอันณึ่งมีในถ้ำรัตนธาร. Moreover, detailed and precise inscription no.4 (or Carük Wat Pa Mamuang, in Khmer) makes a clear distinction between the "sacred stances" (*brah̤ gāthā*, face IV-12-15) and the [simple] stone on which they are engraved.

19. My translation: "So he went up to pay homage to the holy footprint that his father had once placed on the summit of this Sumanakūṭa mountain, then he engraved this new inscription."

20. My translation: "'This stone was given by Nai Phan Phisanukam and Nai Sang, son of Nai Thep, undertook . . . to make an inscription with it to remain in the religion of the Buddha."

21. The stelae were generally smaller than an adult person and were fairly easily transportable in an ox cart.

22. Or "an official of *cao mün* rank called Sam Lan."

23. Note the revity of the expression for writing and recording, using the simple verb *wai* (ไว้).

24. ปลงคดีลงคำ = to authorize, to allow.

25. Here read as กด, but Penth reads กฎ and translates ราชบัณฑิตหากกด = ราชบัณฑิตเป็นผู้กำหนด (CLI 3, 81 note 39).

26. Similarly, JM05B03 (1560) names three ladies who carried the order: ๓ คนนี้นำเอาอาชญามา
จารีตไว้.

27. I more or less follow the translation given in LI, 2–I p. 435 ("if any governor"), or CLI-6, p. 173 ("country administrators"). Line 1, Penth reads พระ instead of เค้า (CLI-6, p. 181).

28. หลาบคำ also found in BY02A06 (see Buchmann's Glossary 2011, 189). Another name was
สุพรรณบัฏ. Silver sheets and plates are called หลาบเงิน or หิรัญบัฏ.

29. For example, in the *Manorathapūraṇī* a commentary of the Aṅguttara Nikāya compiled by
Buddhaghosa in the 6th century and based on an ancient commentarial tradition.

30. For more on the *sakdina* system and the Lan Na general economy, see Sarassawadee 2005,
90–99.

31. The Prince Patriarch Vajirañāṇavarorasa devoted a short chapter to the subject of Visuṅgāmasīmā in *The Entrance to the Vinaya* (1983, 42–43). He explained that "A King who is a
Buddhist Patron wishing to assist the sangha issues a decree to make the site for a wat (monastery).
A visuṅgāmasīmā, according to the royal tradition, is also the royal permission to build a wat."

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# Decoding the Hidden Words: The Encoded Texts and Paratexts in Siamese Manuscript Culture[1]

PEERA PANARUT

## Introduction

Modern students of Thai literature are often assigned to read Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*, the earliest treatise on Thai (Siamese) orthography and poetics. To understand this work fully, students must be familiar with encoded text — various types of orthographic alteration that are mentioned and exemplified, but without any thorough clarification. Anyone confronting these encoded texts without knowledge of decoding would be confused and fail to make sense of text hidden behind the code. These codes are based on systems of substitute letters and numerals and of orthographic alteration, known in Thai as *rahat aksòn* (encoded/secret writing). They have been part of Siamese manuscript and literary culture since the 17th century at least; lessons on encoded texts can be found in almost all manuscripts of *Cindamani*, a text that dates from the second half of the 17th century. The code systems, possibly developed under Indian influences (Frankfurter 1906, 62), might have been used to conceal messages in confidential and military letters (Chanthit Krasaesin 1962, 95; Dhanit Yupho 2015, 32).

The code system from *Cindamani* is sometimes considered to be an extension of the *konlabot* tradition (Warangkana Srikamnerd 2018, 109), or a means of poetic wordplay, such as alliteration, repetition, and irregular placement of words or lines, sometimes employing graphics and illustrations. Nonetheless, the codes differ from various types of *konlabot* in the Siamese poetic tradition in many aspects. The codes do not give any poetic embellishment, as with alliteration or repetition in *konlabot*, and code rules can be adapted for writing both prose and verse, while the *konlabot* applies to poetry only. Therefore, the code system has not been included in any other treatises on the *konlabot*, nor literature demonstrating other types of *konlabot* (Keerati Dhanachai 2011), and seems to have developed its own tradition.

There is little evidence to indicate actual use of encoded text in the extant Siamese manuscripts, apart from the poetic treatises. This suggests that the tradition might have been abandoned for many centuries. Evidence on the use of these codes has never been compiled, other than a few studies on Siamese codes, such as an article in English by Oskar Frankfurter (1906) and an explanation in Chanthit Krasaesin's edition of *Cindamani* (1962). These topics remain under-studied among modern scholars and students of Thai literature. However, various types of codes have been widely recognized in Siamese manuscript culture through traditional treatises on orthography and poetics for many centuries. Furthermore, this tradition has been practiced continuously, even during the 19th century, evidenced by various codes in a number of literary manuscripts, either in texts or paratexts. Although use of encoded texts has survived in a limited number of manuscripts, its tradition must be perceived as a part of the Siamese manuscript culture.

## *Pathom Mala*: A short lesson on primary code

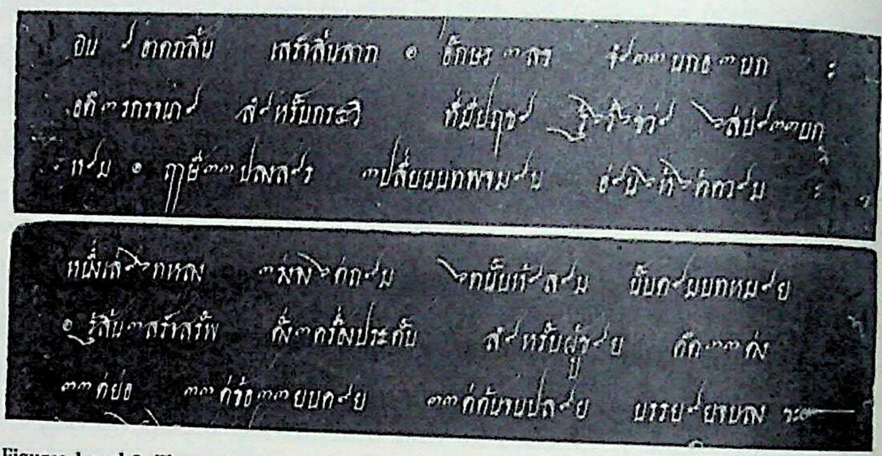
Even though *Cindamani* is considered the earliest surviving treatise on Thai orthography and poetics, its text serves as an advanced, rather than primary, manual. It includes no lessons on basic orthography or how to read and write its Thai script. *Cindamani* provides explanations on three classes of Thai scripts, on how to write different poetic meters (including such advanced ones as *khlong* and *chan*), on poetic lexemes, and on encoded text. Readers and students of *Cindamani* were supposed to have gained knowledge of basic orthography from other primary orthographic treatises, often with titles beginning *Pathom* or *Prathom* (from Pāli: *paṭhama;* Sanskrit: *prathama*; primary or first). Examples include *Pathom Kò Ka* (Primary Alphabet), *Pathom Kò Ka Hat An* (Primary Alphabet and Reader), and *Pathom Mala* (Primary Garland). Students in the Siamese traditional education system always began with these primary treatises to gain basic literacy before continuing with such advanced treatises as *Cindamani* (Pariyat Thammathada 1972, 30).

One well-known primary treatise is *Pathom Mala*, attributed to Phra Thep Moli (Phueng) around the mid-19th century (Niyada Lausoonthorn 2009, 95). The middle section of the text presents a lesson on one particular code. *Pathom Mala* is versified in three different *kap* meters, serving as a reader or providing a reading practice for words in different finals (the non-final, -n final, -ng final, etc). Then the use of vowels is explained, followed by a lesson on a code called *aksòn lek* (อักษรเลข, numeral writing), in which each numeral is used to represent a vowel. An explanation of encoding and decoding is given in two stanzas of *kap surangkhanang*, while an example of encoded poetry appears in three subsequent stanzas.

| **Text:** | **Translation:** |
|---|---|
| ๑ ๒ ทั้งคู่ ใช้ต่าง อุ อู ให้ดูจงที | Both 1 and 2 are used as < ุ > (short *u*) and < ู >(long *u*) |
| ๓ ต่าง เอ ได้ | 3 can substitute < เ > (*e*) |
| ๔ ใช้เล่ห์ที วิสันชะนี ถี่ถ้วนควรถวิล ฯ | 4 is used for *wisanchani* < ะ > (*a* with final) |
| ๕ แทน ผัด ใช้ | 5 is used for *mai phat* < ั > (*a* without final) |
| ๖ ต่าง ไอ ใอ | 6 for both *ai* vowels < ไ, ใ > |
| ๗ ใช้เป็น พินธุ์ | 7 for < ิ > (*i*) |
| ๘ บัญญัติอ้าง ต่าง โอ จงยิน | 8 for *o* vowel < โ > |
| ๙ อาตราสิ้น เสร็จสิ้นสารา ฯ | 9 for long *a* < า >, and that is all. |

In these two stanzas, all the numerals from 1 to 9 have been used to represent the different vowels:

๑ (1) = ั　　๒ (2) = ุ　　๓ (3) = เ　　๔ (4) = ะ　　๕ (5) = ี
๖ (6) = ไ, ใ　　๗ (7) = ิ　　๘ (8) = โ　　๙ (9) = า



**Figures 1 and 2:** Three stanzas mentioning and demonstrating the use of *aksòn lek* code from a manuscript of *Pathom Mala*. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 99, verso pp. 2–3. For a printed edition, see Fine Arts Department 1963, 126–127)

| **Decoded text:** | | **Translation:** |
|---|---|---|
| | อักษรเลข | *Aksòn lek* |
| จำแนกอเนก | อติเรกรจนา | has been specifically clarified here |
| สำหรับกระวี | ที่มีปฤชา | for any poets who possess intelligence, |
| รู้ไว้ไช่ว่า | ใส่บ่าแบกหาม | as this knowledge does not weigh you down. |
| | ฤๅษีแปลงสาร | *Rüsi plaeng san* |
| เปลี่ยนบทพจมาน | อ่านให้ได้ความ | that has been altered, please be able to read through |
| หนึ่งเล่ห์ไทหลง | เร่งจงใต่ถาม | Another one called *thai long*, please rush to learn |
| ไทนับห้าสาม | นับตามบทหมาย ฯ | *Thai nap ha* and *nap sam*, please count as the rule |
| | รู้สิ้นเสร็จสรัพ | When thoroughly known, |
| ดั่งเครื่องประดับ | สำหรับผู้ชาย | it is like an ornament for men. |
| คัดแต่งแต่ย่อ | แต่ข้อแยบคาย | The abridged explanation of the code |
| แต่ต้นจนปลาย | บรรยายจบลง ฯ | has been given here to the end. |

The example above shows the only three stanzas fully encoded in *aksòn lek* in the entire text of *Pathom Mala*. Furthermore, the text considers knowledge of the codes as a sign of intelligence or embellishment for the (male) poets and scholars. This suggests that knowledge of codes implies a level higher than the commonplace. In addition to *aksòn lek*, the text mentions other types of codes (*rüsi plaeng san*, *thai long*, *thai nap ha*, and *thai nap sam*), though without any further explanations or examples. The text of *Pathom Mala* only introduces readers and students to the names of the codes; lessons on these codes were expected to be learned from more-advanced treatises, such as *Cindamani*.

## Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*: A variety of codes

Although the original text of *Cindamani* was composed by Phra Horathibodi in the court of King Narai of Ayutthaya (r. 1656–1688), only manuscripts dating from the late 18th century have survived (the earliest dated 1782). The text was widely used in Siamese traditional education until the late 19th century (Jumsai 1973, 155; Wyatt 1969, 21–22), and more than 100 copies of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani* have survived, from the collection of the royal palace to the monastic collections in rural areas. The tradition of *Cindamani* also allows scribes and scholars to edit the text, to extract lessons considered useful for their own teaching, and to omit sections. As a result, many different recensions of the text have survived (Dhanit Yupho 2015). All share common content, but the selection and order varies. Some recensions of the manuscripts, such as the version by Phraya Thibet, omit all the orthography and focus primarily on poetics.

Despite this rather open interpretation of *Cindamani*, lessons on the various codes are included in almost all extant manuscripts, either at the beginning or the end of the text. Most manuscripts provide five types of codes (all mentioned in *Pathom Mala*): *aksòn lek*, *rüsi plaeng san*, *thai long*, *thai nap ha*, and *thai nap sam*. These can be perceived as the common codes in the *Cindamani* text. Lessons on these common codes have appeared regularly in manuscripts of *Cindamani*, implying that this section has been transmitted since the Ayutthaya period, and not added later by scribes and scholars in Bangkok. A few manuscripts cover additional types of codes, hereinafter called alternative codes, such as *phraya ok taek* and *fon saen ha*. These alternative codes, although less well-known, have also been used in Siamese manuscript culture.

In accordance with the rule explained in *Pathom Mala*, *Cindamani* provides the key paradigm for the *aksòn lek* code, in which different vowels are combined to form a consonant, along with an example of a stanza in *khlong* meter, fully encoded in *aksòn lek*:

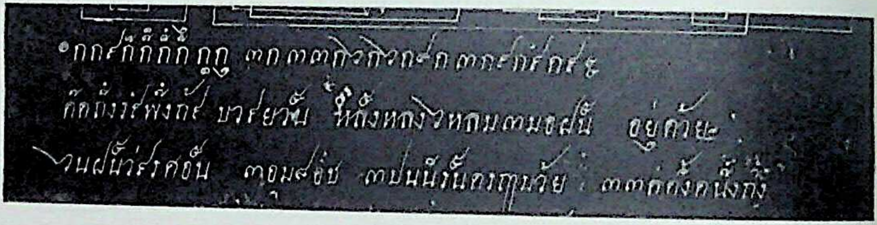


**Figure 3:** The key paradigm and an example of *aksòn lek* code from the earliest manuscript (dated 1782) of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 60, verso p. 36)

**Decoded Text:**

Line[2] 1: ก กา กิ กี กึ กื กุ กู เก แก ไก ใก โก เกา กำ กะ
2: คิดถึงรำพึงถ้อย บวายวัน หลังหลงใหลมเมอฝัน อยู่ด้วย
3: ในฝันว่ารศอัน เอมโอช เปนนิรันดรฤๅม้วย แต่ตั้งคนึงถึง

**Translation (lines 2–3):**

"I think of your words every day, after having dreamt about being with (you). In the dream, the sweetness is never-ending. So I always yearn for it."

This example comes from the earliest manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*, dated 1782 (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Subsection, Ms. no. 60). This is considered the recension of the earliest manuscript (ฉบับลายมือเขียนเก่าที่สุด; Dhanit Yupho 2015, 15). The colophon at the beginning of the manuscript mentions the titles of the royal scribe as the editor and the copyists of the text. This indicates the origin of the manuscript in the royal palace and the status of the royal manuscript

(Boontuean Sriworapot 2015, 8). In addition, Khun Maha Sit (ขุนมหาสิท), the deputy of the department of royal scribes, is mentioned in the colophon as the person who carried out the editing, not the one who composed the text. The copied and edited text of this manuscript (Ms. no. 60) must have been based on fragments from the Ayutthaya Kingdom, and subsequently authorized by the royal scribes as one of the royal recensions of *Cindamani*. This manuscript text also includes five common codes.

The code of *thai long* (ไทยหลง; Thai getting lost) uses one consonant to represent another as a pair without any phonetic correspondence. For example, according to the rules of *thai long* the letter *Kò* < ก > is used to represent *ngò* < ง > and vice versa. As a result, text encoded with *thai long* would barely be comprehensible. *Cindamani* provides the key paradigms for this code, in which each pair of letters is pointed and linked by strokes (see Figure 4) along with an example of an encoded stanza. Furthermore, several manuscripts from different recensions include one short poem as a mnemonic for all pairs of the code. One such example appears in the manuscript of *Cindamani* edited by Prince Patriarch Paramanuchit Chinorot (1790–1853) in the mid-19th century (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 35).

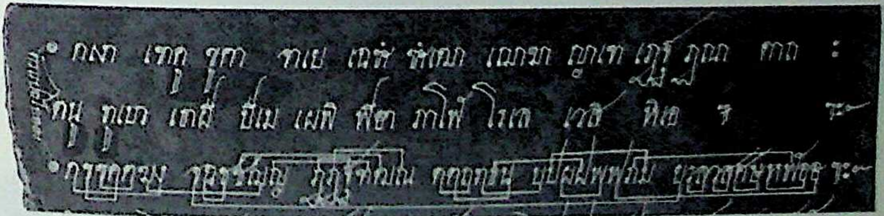


Figure 4: The key paradigms for *thai long* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani* edited by Prince Patriarch Paramanuchit Chinorot. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 35, verso p. 9)

**Text of mnemonic poem:**

Line 1: กเงา เขาคู ขูฅา จาเย เฉซ่า ซ่าเฌา เฌาฆา ญาเฑ เฎฐ ฏฒา ตาถ
2: ตนู ทูเบา เธาฝี ปีเม เผพิ พิฮา ภาโห โรเล เวลิ หิเอ ฯ

According to the mnemonic and the paradigm from the figure, the encoded pairs of *thai long* can be summarized:

ก = ง ข = ค ฃ = ฅ จ = ย
ฉ = ช ซ = ฌ ญ = ฆ ฎ = ฐ
ฏ = ณ ด = ถ ต = น ท = บ
ธ = ฝ ป = ม ผ = พ ฟ = ฮ
ภ = ฬ ร = ล ว = ส ห = อ ศ = ษ[3]

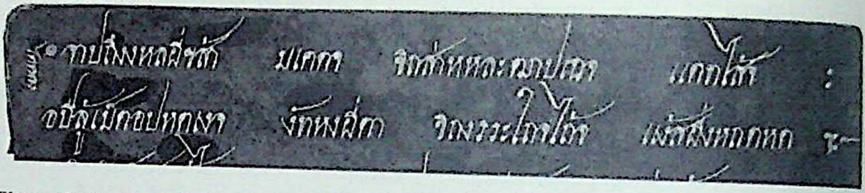


**Figure 5:** An example of text encoded in *thai long* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani* edited by Prince Patriarch Paramanuchit Chinorot. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 35, verso p. 7)

**Decoded Text:**
Line 1: ยามดึกกอรพี่คว้า ป(ะ)เขนย คิดว่าออระชามเชย แนบไว้ย
2: หมิรู้เปนหมอนเกย กับอกพี่นา คิดกลละใดยได้ย แก้วพี่กอดนอน

**Translation:**
"At night my hands sought out and found the pillow. I hugged it to me thinking it was you. Without knowing it is a pillow, I took it to my chest and could only hug it as my love when sleeping."

*Thai nap* codes alter the orthographic order of the words in each line and sentence. In case of *thai nap sam* (counting three), one needs to read every third letter to decode the text (see Figure 6). *Thai nap ha* (counting five) code follows a similar rule, reading every fifth letter.

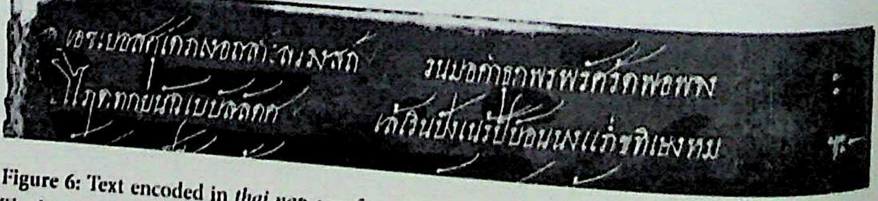


**Figure 6:** Text encoded in *thai nap sam* from Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 35, verso p. 4)

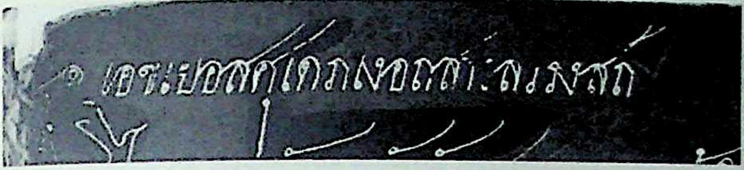


Figure 7: Sample decoded line of *thai nap sam*, reading every third letter. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 35, verso p. 4)

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| เ | อ | ข | เ | ย | อ | ส | ศุ | เ | ด | ภ | เ | ง | อ | ถ | ส | า | ล | เ | ร | ะ | ส้ | ถ | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | = ขอแถลง |
| 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | = แสดงสารส้ |
| 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | = อยศุภอรรถ |

Decoded Text: ขอแถลงแสดงสารส้อย ศุภอรรถ
Translation: "May I begin my words as a fine message!"

Another common code from *Cindamani* is *rüsi plaeng san* (message transformed by a hermit). The name refers to a hermit in the tale of Phra Rot Meri (Chanthit Krasaesin 1962, 176). In this code, the orthographic order is altered by switching the initial and final letters of each word. Thus the vowels ( เ แ ไ โ ) that are supposed to precede the initial consonant are written after it, while the vowels ( ะ า ) following the consonants and the final consonants are written before the initial consonant.

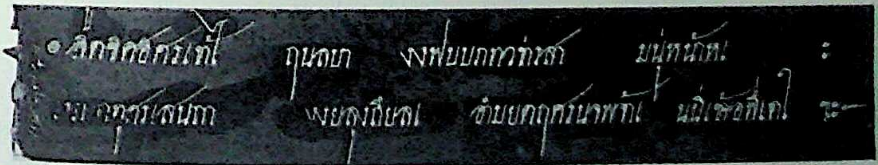


Figure 8: An example of text encoded in *rüsi plaeng san* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 35, verso p. 7)

**Decoded Text:**
Line 1: ลิขิตอิสเรศให้ นฤบาล ฟังบทราบข่าวสาร หนุ่มเหน้า
2: มรรคาทุเรศสถาน ยังสุ ถึงเลย อำมฤตยรศพจนเจ้า เนิ่นเช้าเพื่อใด

**Translation:**
"The letter from the Lord, who does not hear any news from the young lover, can even reach the faraway place. The ambrosia of your word, why should you delay [sending to me]?"

In addition to the abovementioned five common codes, some *Cindamani* manuscripts include alternative codes as a part of their lessons on encoded text:

*Phraya ok taek* (broken-chested lord) is not really an alteration of orthographic order, rather a distortion of the letter form, in which the upper part of each letter is linked to the lower part of the following letter. Thus the entire writing appears blurred. Reading the encoded text one is time-consuming, but not too difficult. The orthography of the consonants and vowels still follows the regular rules of writing.

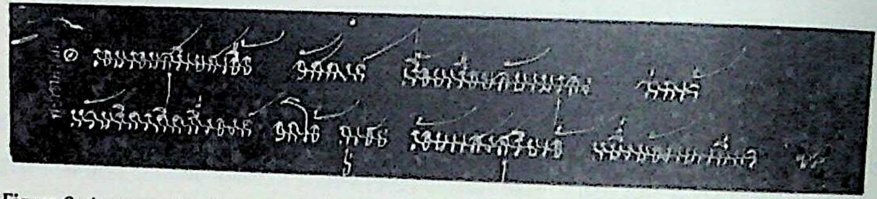


**Figure 9:** An example of text encoded in *phraya ok taek* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 28, verso p. 7)

**Decoded Text:**

Line 1: รอนรอนสุริเยศเอื้อ อัศดงค์ เรื่อยเรื่อยลับเมรุลง ว่ำกเว้
2: หวันจิตรคิดถึ่งองค์ อกโอ้ กูเฮย ร้อนแสงสุริยเอ้ หนึ่งน้องเนาเดียว

**Translation:**

"In this twilight, when the sun has passed the mountains, I feel lonely, thinking of my dear beloved. Now I feel burned by the light of the sun, as I missed you my dear!"

A more complicated code included in some *Cindamani* manuscripts is *fon saen ha* (hundred thousand amounts of rain). This uses 2 numerical digits (written vertically) to represent one consonant. To encode each consonant with 2 numerical digits, the 44 Thai consonants are divided into 9 groups (each consisting of 5 consonants) following alphabetical order. The first (upper) digit represents the ordinal number of the group (1–9), while the second (lower) digit represents the ordinal number of the letter within a specific group (1–5). Combining the two digits allows substitution of each letter of Thai alphabet, as in the paradigm given in *Cindamani* (Figure 10).

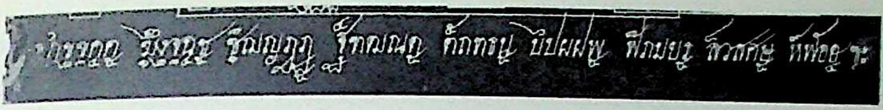


Figure 10: A key paradigm for *fon saen ha* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani* edited by Prince Patriarch Paramanuchit Chinorot. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 35, verso p. 9)

From the above paradigm, a numerical representation of all 44 Thai consonants encoded in *fon saen ha* can be summarized:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ก ข ฃ ค ฅ | ฆ ง จ ฉ ช | ซ ฌ ญ ฎ ฏ | ฐ ฑ ฒ ณ ด |
| ๑ ๑ ๑ ๑ ๑ | ๒ ๒ ๒ ๒ ๒ | ๓ ๓ ๓ ๓ ๓ | ๔ ๔ ๔ ๔ ๔ |
| ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ | ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ | ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ | ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ |
| ต ถ ท ธ น | บ ป ผ ฝ พ | ฟ ภ ม ย ร | ล ว ส ศ ษ |
| ๕ ๕ ๕ ๕ ๕ | ๖ ๖ ๖ ๖ ๖ | ๗ ๗ ๗ ๗ ๗ | ๘ ๘ ๘ ๘ ๘ |
| ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ | ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ | ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ | ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ |
| ห ฬ อ ฮ | | | |
| ๙ ๙ ๙ ๙ | | | |
| ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ | | | |

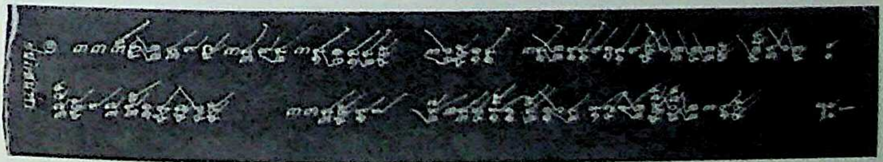


Figure 11: An example of text encoded in *fon saen ha* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani* edited by Prince Patriarch Paramanuchit Chinorot. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 35, verso p. 8)

**Decoded Text:**

Line 1: แสดะสารเสาวเลขลวน เปนกล เลงหลากลานใจฉงน ชือไข
2: มีนามอักษรฝน แสนห่า วิเสศหักวักไว หยางนีพึงเหน

**Translation:**

"(I) demonstrate the numerals as code, playing with and confusing the mind. It is called *fon saen ha*, as demonstrated here."

There are other variations of *fon saen ha*. In some manuscripts, *fon saen ha* is not based on the entire Thai alphabet (44 letters), but on a reduced set of 35 letters, excluding nine rarely used consonants (ฎ ฏ ฐ ฑ ฒ ณ ศ ษ ฬ). These are mostly retroflex consonants from Pāli and Sanskrit. Thus the number of the consonant groups reduces to seven from nine. The lower number of consonants might simplify the process of encoding text in *fon saen ha* code.

*Fòng hu chang* (bubbles of the elephant's ear) is another code related to *fon saen ha*. It also uses numerals to represent consonants based on the order of the letter in the alphabetic sets divided into groups. However, instead of two digits, *fòng hu chang* employs one digit above and dots below. The upper digit still represents the ordinal number of the group, while the dots below represent the ordinal number of the letter in the specific group (1–5 dots). Note that *fòng hu chang* code is based on the reduced alphabet of 35 letters, divided into seven groups. Thus the digit in *fòng hu chang* code cannot exceed seven. *Fòng hu chang*, along with its key paradigm and sample text, are rarely found in *Cindamani* manuscripts. One example from Ms. no. 28 is given below.

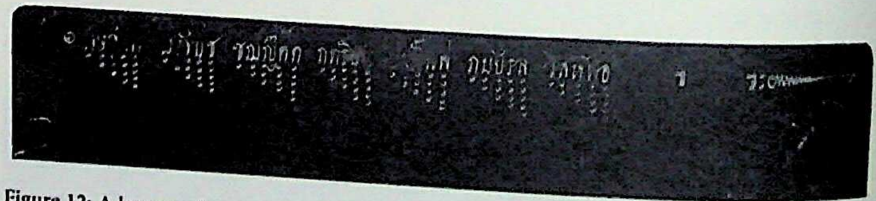
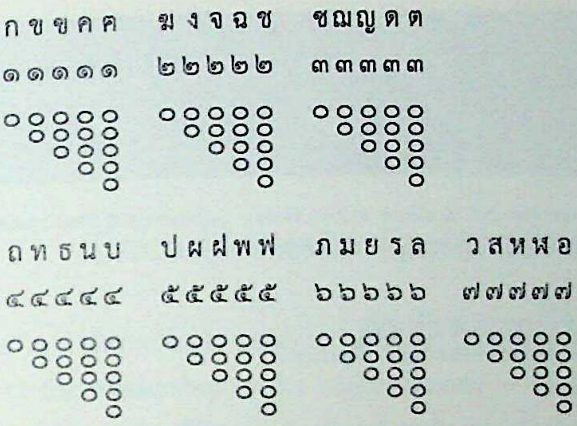


**Figure 12:** A key paradigm of *fòng hu chang* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 28, verso p. 3)

From the above paradigm, a representation of all 44 Thai consonants employing numerals with dots encoded in *fòng hu chang* can be summarized:


ก ข ฃ ค ฅ
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ถ ท ธ น บ
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ป ผ ฝ พ ฟ
๕ ๕ ๕ ๕ ๕
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ว ส ห ฬ อ
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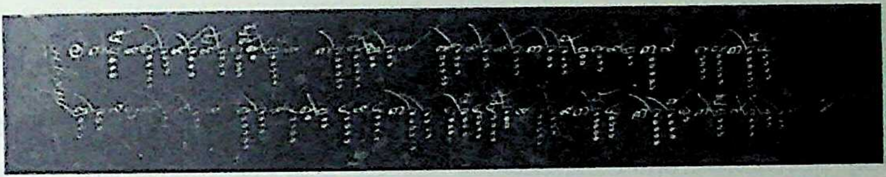

**Figure 13:** An example of text encoded in *fông hu chang* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*. (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 28, verso p. 9)

**Decoded Text:**
Line 1: เจ้าอยาย้ายคิ้วชำ เลืองมา อยามายเมียงหางตา หอเล้น
2: จมาก็มารา อยานวง นานเลย ครันพีมาอยาเร้น เรียกเจ้าจงมา

**Translation:**
"Please do not move your gaze to me, do not play with your glance. Please come if you want to, do not wait! When I am here, please do not hide when I call for you!"

Another code that is even more rarely found is mirror writing, in which text is written in lateral inversion (as reflected in a mirror). The only single *Cindamani* manuscript that includes mirror writing in its lessons on encoded texts is preserved in Leipzig:

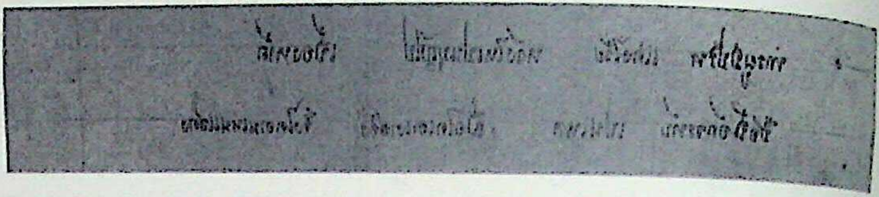

**Figure 14:** An example of text encoded in mirror writing from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani*. (SAs 14002, Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, recto p. 71)

**Decoded Text:**

Line 1: ท่ารผู้มีปรีชา แต่งไว้ย หวังไหเปนบุญไป เบื้องหน้า
2: ขือนี้อักขรทับ เปนเหล เมื่อไดเอาเงาส่อง จึ่งไดอานเหนแสดง

**Translation:**

"The wise one has composed [this poem], hoping it be a merit in the future. This writing is called by its name "Aksòn thap," used as a code. When reflected [in the mirror], it will be readable and understood."

Codes in Siamese traditional education vary from the alteration of alphabetic order and representation of letters and numerals to distortion of the writing's appearance — ranging from the simplest rules to the most complicated ones. The variety of encoded texts commonly appearing *Cindamani* indicates that the codes are widely known and apparently recognized as higher poetic knowledge in the Siamese traditional education system. Although the text of *Cindamani* has been edited continually by later scribes and scholars during the late-18th and the 19th centuries, encoded texts have never been excluded or omitted. On the contrary, several alternative codes have been included in later manuscripts. Anyone who gained a traditional education through such treatises as *Cindamani* and *Pathom Mala* would be familiar with these codes, although not everyone would master them.

In addition to source information from traditional treatises, actual use of codes has been preserved fragmentarily in manuscripts, though not so frequently. The descriptions and exemplifications of codes from treatises represent valuable theoretical evidence, in which the rules for each code are summarized in key paradigms that reveal how the codes function. However, to contextualize the tradition of encoded texts as a part of Siamese manuscript culture, one also needs to explore uses of encoded texts and paratexts from actual manuscripts. This forms significant, albeit limited, practical evidence of how the codes have were used and practiced.

## Encoded texts: Rarity of secrecy

Codes are deliberately used to hide the message of the writing and to restrict the readership to the highly literate — those who possesses the key to decryption. The original and main usage of the code is presumed to have been confidential dispatches in warfare and administration, and even secret love letters. The material for letters in traditional Siamese manuscript culture was usually a small piece of *phlao* paper, which was convenient for shipping (sending and receiving). However, this medium was rather fragile and susceptible to damage and loss. Evidence of actual letters from the traditional period is limited to a few administrative letters at the National Library of Thailand; personal letters have seldom survived due to deterioration of the manuscript material. On the other hand, palm-leaf manuscripts and *khòi*-paper leporello manuscripts (*samut khòi*) have been used to preserve texts, especially longer texts, because of their durability, rather than being used for writing messages to be sent as dispatches or secret letters. No actual letters exist among the leporello manuscripts in the subsection of *phleng yao sangwat* or the love epistolary poetry in *klòn phleng yao* meter at the National Library of Thailand; all the manuscripts in this genre appear in collections of love letters, not as the physical letters themselves. Neither have encoded texts been found among the manuscripts of *phleng yao sangwat*.

Nevertheless, use of codes has been found within the main text of manuscripts, but it is rare. One example comes from a manuscript (possibly from the 19th century) that preserves the bilingual Pāli-Thai text of *Vessantara Jataka* in *rai* meter. In this manuscript, a short passage of the text has been encoded in *phraya ok taek*, making the writing of this section blurred and difficult to read. However, as *phraya ok taek* code mainly distorts the appearance of the writing, the encoded writing in this manuscript can be identified (Figure 15).

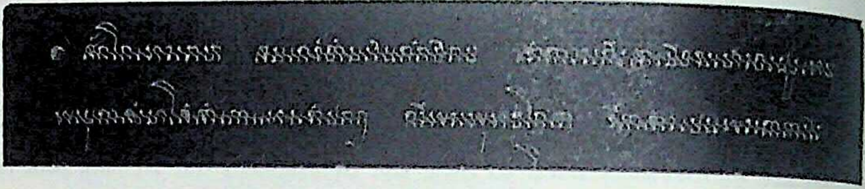

**Figure 15:** A passage of text encoded in *phraya ok taek* from a manuscript of *Vessantara Jataka* in ra *yao* meter. (National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms. no. 169, verso p. 48)

**Decoded Text:**
สักโกเทวะราชา สมเดจ์อำมะรินตราธิราช เจ้าดาววะดึงสาเมือจะเปนองฝูงเทบ พะยุดาลิ่งมาโล้สำเภาแหงเจ้าปร
ครีพระพุทธโกสา จึงกล้าวเปนพระคาถาฉะ(นี้)

**Translation:**
*Sakko devarājā* The god Indra who is the lord of all gods of Tavatimsa Heaven when he went down (to the earth) to sail the junk ship of lords, as it is said in the following verses by Phra Phuttha Khosa ...

The objective of codes in this manuscript does not seem to hide any secret message from common readers, rather to create a visual play when reading this short passage at the end of the manuscript. In addition, *phraya ok taek* might have been used simply as an affectation.

Another manuscript containing code in the main text is a *khòi*-paper manuscript carrying a Thai version of Buddhist cosmology in which *aksòn lek* code is found. This manuscript is preserved at Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (State Library of Berlin, Germany) under the inventory number: Mss or fol 3188, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Although *aksòn lek* code is used in this manuscript, it appears inconsistently for a few words over several lines in the early pages, before disappearing from the rest of the manuscript. The words encoded are rather common (Figure 16) and probably have been randomly selected. Therefore, the use of code in this manuscript is certainly not for the purpose of secrecy, but possibly an experiment or affectation by the scribe.

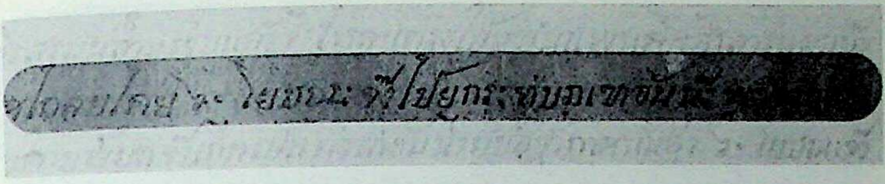

Figure 16: A passage inconsistently encoded in *aksòn lek* from a manuscript of Buddhist cosmology. (Mss or fol 3188, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, recto p. 10)

Encoded Text: ... ไกลยไดย ๖๐ โยชณะจึ่งไป้ยกระทบภูเขาอันนึ่งพูงออกไป้ย...
Decoded Text: ... ไกลยไดย ๖๐ โยชณะจึ่งไป้ยกระทบภูเขาอันนึ่งพุ่งออกไป้ย...
Translation: ". . . faraway for 60 *yojana* then [it] will meet one mountain which spreads . . ."

The most extraordinary case for a code used in main text is a palm-leaf manuscript of a traditional treatise on sexology found in Chachoeng Sao province, which contains extensive use of *aksòn lek* and *fòng hu chang* codes in many parts. The genre of traditional sexology is obscure in Siamese manuscript culture, but a few manuscripts have survived (Aphilak Kasempholkoon 2007; Sukanya Sujachaya 2018). This untitled palm-leaf manuscript clearly concerns knowledge on sexuality and astrology, as well as medicine relating to sexuality. (For the entire printed text of this manuscript: Sukanya Sujachaya 2018, 113–147.) Interestingly, a number of keywords and phrases in many folia have been encoded in *aksòn lek* and *fòng hu chang*. Although entire sentences have not been encoded, so common readers might partially comprehend the message of the text, encryption of more than 100 words and phrases throughout the text, including keywords, would certainly deter common readers and mask important details described.

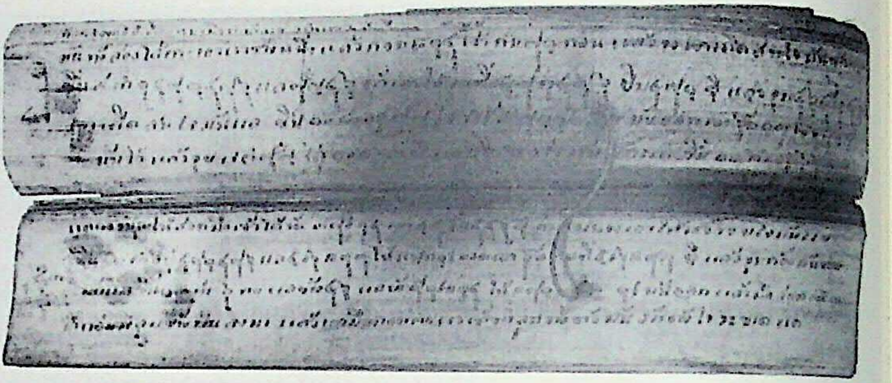

Figure 17: Example of encoded text in a treatise on sexology. (Folio 42–43; Private Collection; Uncatalogued)

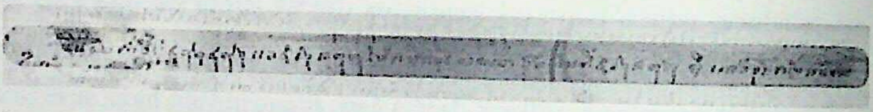

Figure 18: Example of a line with encoded text in a treatise on sexology. (Folio 43 Line 2; Private Collection; Uncatalogued)

**Encoded Text:**

ขึ้น ๑๒ ค่ำอยู่ ๔ ๗ ๒ ๔ ๗ ๖ แล ๕ ๙ ๖ ๘ ๓ ๓ ให้แหก ๑ ๙ ออกเอา ๖ึ๒ ที่ม
ที่ ๕ ๙ ๖ ๘ ๓ ๓ แล้วจูบท้องมันซอบ (นักแล)

**Decoded Text:**

ขึ้น ๑๒ ค่ำอยู่ ทองนอย (ท้องน้อย) แลปายแตด (ปลายแตด) ให้แหกขาออกเอาลึงที่มที่ปายแตดแล้วจูบท้องมันซอบ (นักแล)

**Translation:**

"On the 12th day of the waxing moon, [the *kama* or the sexually sensitive point] stays on the underbelly and tip of the clitoris. Stretch [her] legs apart and then insert the penis to the tip of the clitoris and kiss her underbelly. She will be so pleased."

The words encoded in this text mainly concern sexual intercourse and sexual organs, which can sound crude if expressed directly in modern language. Nevertheless, the code in this treatise on sexology cannot have been used to avoid specific sexual words because the very same words appear non-encoded elsewhere in the manuscript. Thus, the main purpose of this extensive and relatively complicated code might have been to prevent access to the complete text and deny the reader full knowledge of its content. This effectively limits readership to an exclusive literate group, possibly students of the manuscript's owner who have been taught how to decode it. Even though *fòng hu chang* code appears in very few manuscripts of *Cindamani* and has never numbered among the common codes, its use in this treatise bears significant evidence of how the code was practiced in manuscript culture. Furthermore, this treatise on sexology is the only case among three examples discussed here in which the purpose of the code is secrecy. The secrecy in this case does not concern military affairs or confidential personal communications, but relates to secular knowledge on traditional sexology.

The use of code in main texts has not been commonly found in manuscripts because the regular forms of both palm-leaf manuscripts and *khòi*-paper leporello manuscripts were not primarily intended to preserve any secret writing. However, a number of codes have appeared in scribal paratexts, such as a scribe's preface and colophon. The paratexts apparently have not been encoded for secrecy; the objective seems to be to stimulate the readers' intellect.

## Encoded paratexts: Playing with readers' eyes and intellect

Many different types of scribal paratexts, or the writing of scribes surrounding the main text, can be found in Siamese manuscripts. Examples include prefaces and colophons that inform readers of the date of the manuscript, the date of the text, the names of the scribes and donors, and other information about manuscript production. Side-markers are a type of paratext commonly found in the *khòi*-paper leporello manuscripts. This form of manuscript is made from a long piece of paper that has been folded in a leporello manner. Readers have to find the first page of the recto side (*na ton* หน้าต้น) to read the text sequentially from the beginning (Terwiel 2017, 82), differentiating from the verso side (*na plai* หน้าปลาย). Therefore, the scribes of many manuscripts marked the first and last pages as an aid for readers: "This is the first page of the recto side;" "This side is verso;" or "The end of the recto, please turn to the verso side." In a few cases, the scribal paratexts are encoded. Although rare to find, encoded paratexts are actually more common than encoded texts.

The earliest case for the encoded paratexts I have found is a palm-leaf manuscript on Buddhist cosmology. The colophon on the cover leaf provides the copy date as BE 2249 (1706), during the reign of King Sanphet VIII (1703–1709) of Ayutthaya Kingdom. The text in this manuscript is bilingual Thai-Pāli, while the script throughout is Khòm (in *Mul* and *Chariang* types). In addition to the date, the cover leaf mentions the name of the scribe on the right side. The colophon on the first page is written in the Khòm script, but surprisingly the mention of the scribe's name is encoded in *aksòn lek* (Figure 19), indicating that this code has been employed since the late Ayutthaya period. The code has also been used to encode the writing in the Khòm script (at least for *aksòn lek*), not only in the Thai script, as was the case with *Pathom Mala* and *Cindamani*.

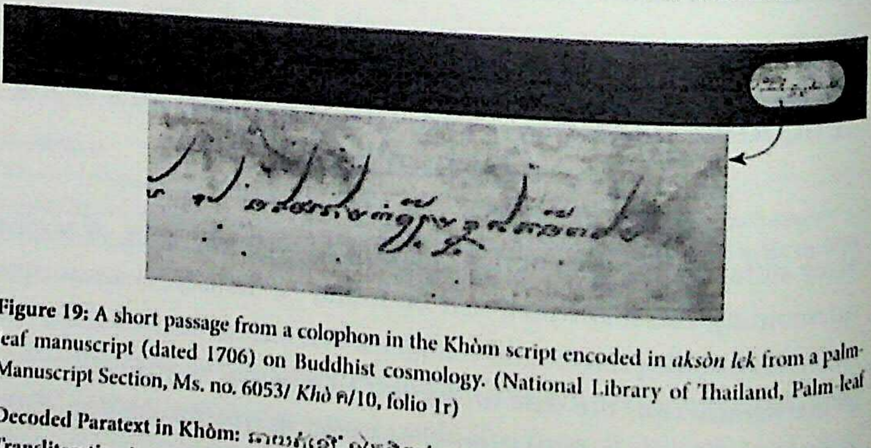

**Figure 19:** A short passage from a colophon in the Khòm script encoded in *aksòn lek* from a palm-leaf manuscript (dated 1706) on Buddhist cosmology. (National Library of Thailand, Palm-leaf Manuscript Section, Ms. no. 6053/ *Khò* ค/10, folio 1r)

**Decoded Paratext in Khòm:** [illegible]
**Transliteration into Thai:** นายอินเขียนขอได้นิพาน
**Translation:** "Nai In wrote this manuscript. Wish I reach *Nibbāna*."

Encoded paratexts also appear in manuscripts of *Cindamani:* the side-markers in Ms. no. 81 (Orthography Section) are encoded in *aksòn lek* (Figure 20) and in *rüsi plaeng san* in Ms. no. 68 (Figure 21). In these cases, the text itself has already provided lessons on the various codes, so the encoded paratexts might have been given as further practical examples and at the same time served to encourage readers to learn the code. On the other hand, these cases could be an intellectual play between the scribes and the readers.

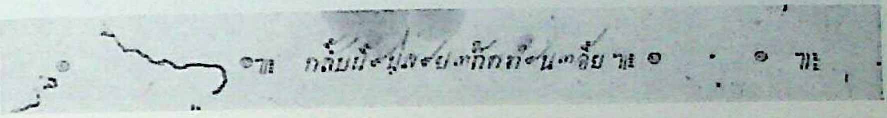

**Figure 20:** A passage from a side-marker encoded in *aksòn lek* from a manuscript of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani.* (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 81, recto p. 76)

**Decoded Paratext:** กลับน้าปลายเถิดท่านเอ้ย ๆ
**Translation:** "Please turn to the verso side."

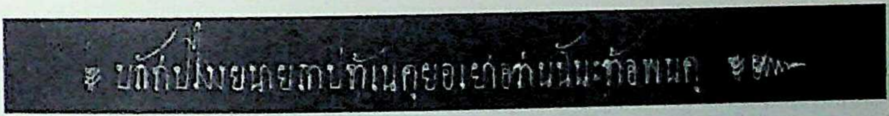

**Figure 21:** A passage from a side-marker encoded in *rüsi plaeng san* from a manuscript (dated 1844) of Phra Horathibodi's *Cindamani.* (National Library of Thailand, Orthography Section, Ms. no. 68, recto p. 76)

**Decoded Paratext:** กลับไปยงนาปลายเจ้าคุนเอยอย่าว่าฉันนะเจ้าพอคุน ๆ ๆ
**Translation:** "Please turn to the verso side. Please do not complain about me [and my writing]."

In addition to *Cindamani*, manuscripts of other literary texts contain encoded paratexts. In a manuscript of *Vessantara Jataka* in *rai* meter (Ms. no. 169, Rai Subsection, ibid.), a short passage of the text appears in *phraya ok taek* code; there are also several paratexts as side-markers at the beginning and the end of the recto that have been encoded in *phraya ok taek* (Figures 22–23), and verso in mirror writing (Figures 24–25). Note that the scribe of this manuscript has chosen codes that create a visual play, such as *phraya ok taek* and mirror writing.

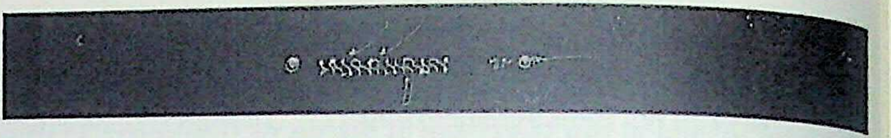

**Figure 22:** A side-marker (at the beginning of the recto side) encoded in *phraya ok taek* from a manuscript of *Vessantara Jataka* in *rai yao* meter. (National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms. no. 169, recto p. 3)

**Decoded Paratext:** หน้าต้นกุมาร
**Translation:** "Recto side of *Kuman* [Chapter]"

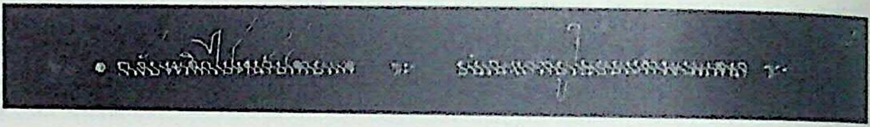

**Figure 23:** A side-marker (at the end of the recto side) encoded in *phraya ok taek* from a manuscript of *Vessantara Jataka* in *rai yao* meter. (National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms. no. 169, recto p. 52)

**Decoded Paratext:** กลับพลิกไปหน้าปลายแล
**Translation:** "Please turn to the verso page"

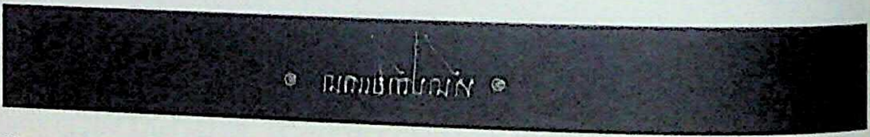

**Figure 24:** A side-marker (at the beginning of the verso side) encoded in mirror writing from a manuscript of *Vessantara Jataka* in *rai yao* meter. (National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms. no. 169, verso p. 1)

**Decoded Paratext:** หน้าปล้ายแลนา
**Translation:** "This is the verso side."

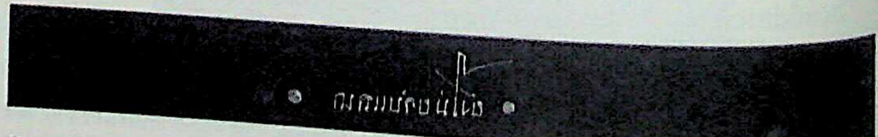

**Figure 25:** A side-marker (at the end of the verso side) encoded in the mirror writing from a manuscript of *Vessantara Jataka* in *rai yao* meter. (National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms. no. 169, verso p. 50)

**Decoded Paratext:** ยังไม่จับแลนา
**Translation:** "The text is not complete yet."

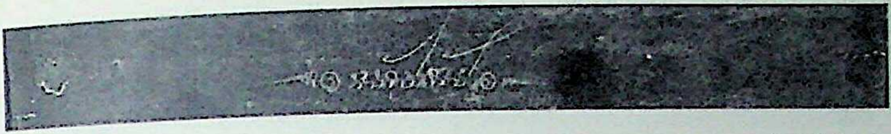

**Figure 26:** A side-marker (at the beginning of the verso side) encoded in *phraya ok taek* from a manuscript of elephant ceremonial treatises in *chan* meter. (National Library of Thailand, Chan Subsection, Ms. no. 46, *Kò* ก Initial, verso p. 1)

**Decoded Paratext:** หน้าปลาย
**Translation:** "[This is] the verso side."

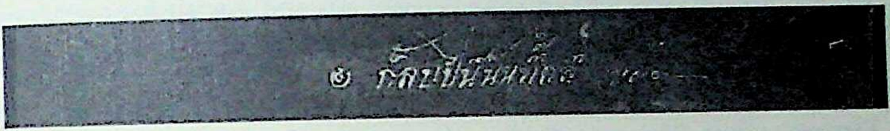

**Figure 27:** A side-marker (at the end of the recto side) encoded in *aksòn lek* from a manuscript of *Khlong Lokkanit*, a collection of didactic poems. (National Library of Thailand, Khlong Suphasit Subsection, Ms. no. 8, recto p. 58)

**Decoded Paratext:** กลับไปนานันเทีดแล ฯ
**Translation:** "Please turn to the other side."

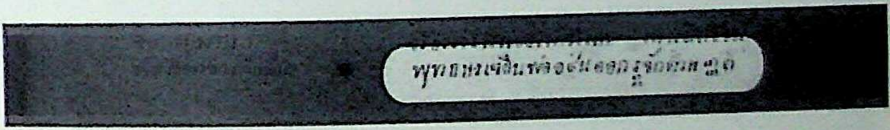

**Figure 28:** A short passage of a colophon partially encoded in *aksòn lek* at the end of a palm-leaf manuscript of *Bunnowat Kham Chan*. (National Library of Thailand, Chan Subsection, Ms. no.1, folio 41r)

**Decoded Paratext:** พุทธษรเขียนพ้ออ่านออกรู้จักตัวแล
**Translation:** "Phutson has written [this manuscript] well enough to be legible."

The other cases of the encoded paratexts are: the marker on the verso page in *phraya ok taek* from a manuscript of elephant ceremonial treatises (Figure 26); the side marker in *aksòn lek* from a manuscript of *Khlong Lokkanit*, a collection of didactic poems (Figure 27); the colophon in *aksòn lek* from a palm-leaf manuscript of *Bunnowat Kham Chan* (Figure 28); and a poem on the legend of the Buddha's footprint in Saraburi province. These encoded paratexts indicate that the different uses of various types of codes, albeit rather short and fragmentary.

The most extensive encoded colophon that I have ever found comes from a manuscript of *Khlong Lokkanit* (a collection of didactic poems in *khlong* meter). This manuscript is preserved at the National Library of Thailand under the inventory number: Ms. no. 40, Khlong Suphasit Subsection. At the end of this manuscript, three different codes (*aksòn lek*, *fon saen ha*, and *fòng hu chang*) are used to write the colophon (Figure 29) bearing the copy date of 1843 (Figure 30) and a wish for merits by the copyist to enter Nibbana in the future. The latter part of this encoded colophon has been versified in *kap chabang* meter (the decoded text in Figures 31–32). This case displays the variety of codes used in Siamese manuscript culture.

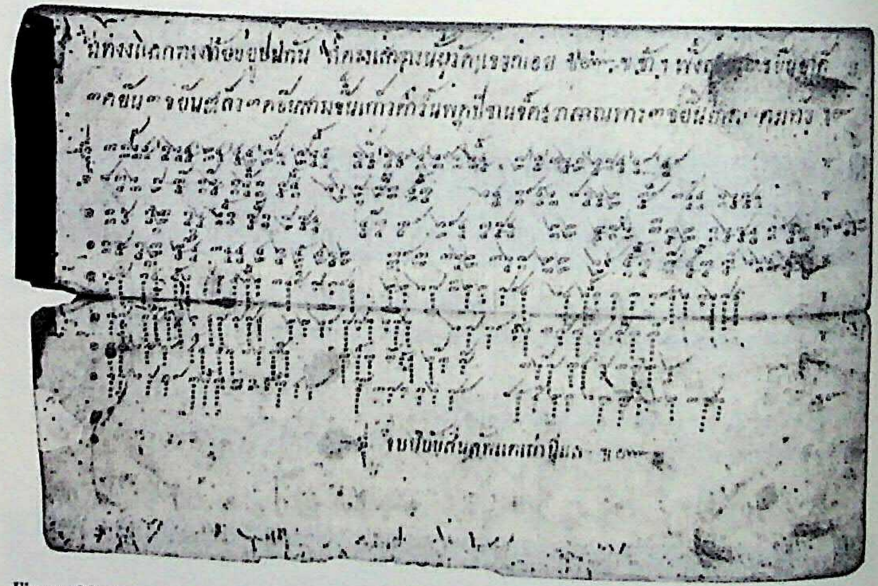

**Figure 29:** An extended colophon encoded in *aksòn lek*, *fon saen ha* and *fòng hu chang* at the end of a manuscript (dated 1843) from *Khlong Lokkanit*, a collection of didactic poems. The encoded colophon in this manuscript is the most extensive paratext encoded in the greatest variety of codes to date. (National Library of Thailand, Khlong Suphasit Subsection, Ms. no. 40, verso pp. 57–58)

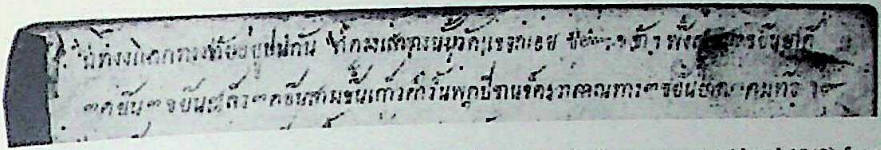

Figure 30: Part of a colophon encoded in *aksòn lek* at the end of a manuscript (dated 1843) from *Khlong Lokkanit*, a collection of didactic poems. (National Library of Thailand, Khlong Suphasit Subsection, Ms. no. 40, verso p. 57)

**Decoded Paratext:**
ข้า ฯ พึงสอนเขียนยาติเตียน เขียนแล้วเดือนสามขึ้นเก้าค่ำวันพุธ ปีขานจัตะวาศก ณ ทาร เขียนยากเตมทือ ฯ

**Translation:**
"I am to teach writing. Please do not complain. This writing was finished on Wednesday the ninth waxing moon of the third lunar month in the Year of Tiger, the fourth year of the decade [corresponding to Wednesday February 8, 1843 or CS1204]. It is rather difficult to write."

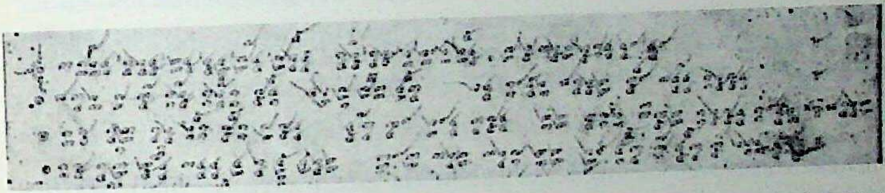

Figure 31: Part of a colophon encoded in *fon saen ha* at the end of a manuscript (dated 1843) of *Khlong Lokkanit*, a collection of the didactic poems. (National Library of Thailand, Khlong Suphasit Subsection, Ms. no. 40, verso p. 57)

**Decoded Paratext:**
เขียนครบจนบทสีนสรัพ คลี่คลายยายยับ สลเลขลวนนานา
โดยสติกริกรีกอัด ไม่สุสัญทัด ในกาพย์โคลงดำเนินกลอน
ขอคุณครูภักอักสอน บิดตามานดอน จงชวยแตงกลอนกาพยโคลง
ขอคุณชินเนนทรผู้ทรง ญาณเรงเรวจง มาปิดวิบัติไภยพาน

**Translation:**
"I have finished the whole writing, transforming [the writing] into many different numerals with my limited ability in poetics. May the merits of my teachers, father, and mother help me in writing poems. May the merits of the Lord Buddha prevent any misfortune."

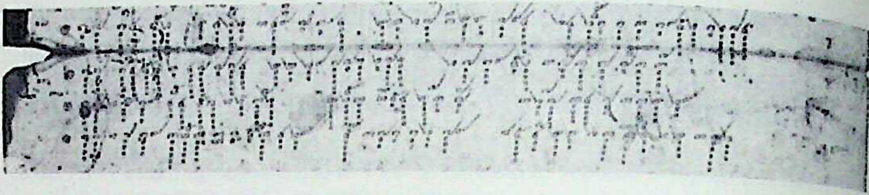

**Figure 32:** Part of a colophon encoded in *fòng hu chang* at the end of a manuscript (dated 1843) of *Khlong Lokkanit*, a collection of the didactic poems. (National Library of Thailand, Khlong Suphasit Subsection, Ms. no. 40, verso pp. 57–58)

**Decoded Paratext:**

ขอคุณพรสงธรัมเนาวกาน จงใหแจงสาน ในลักขณกาพยกลอน
ขอคุณพระบอวอน จงมาอวยภอร ให้ข้าประเสิดสวัดดี
ขอให้ข้าทันพรไมตรี ตรัดเปนชีนสี เมือตนเสดจมา
ขอให้ข้าตรัดแกปัดทมา พิเสกข์มหา โพธิจงได้ดังใจเอย ฯ

**Translation:**

**"May the merits of the Sangha and the Dhamma remain in my writing and give a clear message in a poetic manner. May the merits of the Lord bless me with happiness. May I have chance to see *Phra Maitri* [Sanskrit: *Maitreya*] who will reach his enlightenment at the time he comes [to earth]. May I reach great enlightenment according to my wish."**

These examples of encoded paratexts from various manuscripts indicate that codes have been known among scribes and scholars of the Siamese manuscript culture for many centuries. These date at least from the early 17th century in the late Ayutthaya Kingdom in the form of a palm-leaf manuscript dated in 1706. The tradition has been practiced continuously until the mid-19th century, evidenced by the manuscript with the most extensive encoded colophon, dated 1843 (National Library of Thailand, Khlong Suphasit Subsection, Ms. no. 40) and a manuscript of *Cindamani* dated 1844 (Ms. no. 68). However, the encoded paratexts from these manuscripts do not convey any secret message beyond regular non-encoded paratexts, such as the date, the scribes' names and wishes, and markers to indicate the recto and verso sides. The encoded paratexts might have been intended as an affectation for readers by the scribes in case of codes featuring visual distortion (such as *phraya ok taek* and mirror writing), or to stimulate the readers' intellect, in case of more arduous codes that require a higher level of knowledge to recognize and decode. Codes, therefore, were used both to conceal secret messages and as an intellectual affectation or test between scribes and readers over the centuries, despite the fact that the scribes and the readers were not contemporary.

## Conclusion

The encoded texts and paratexts in Siamese manuscripts, though limited in number, undeniably confirm that the tradition of encoding was practiced continuously among the highly literate at least until the mid-19th century. The palm-leaf manuscript on traditional sexology represents the most extensive use of codes in the main text, while the manuscript of *Khlong Lokkanit* (Ms. no. 40, Khlong Suphasit Subsection) contains the most extensive encoded paratext ever found. Codes have been regularly included in the hundreds of editions of *Cindamani*, and their use in texts and paratexts of the actual manuscripts indicates that lessons on codes in *Cindamani* were never obsolete during the traditional period. The different usage of codes, spanning various manuscript types, illustrates their living tradition of learning and practice.

Nevertheless, further study on the codes in Siamese manuscript culture is needed to uncover more manuscripts with encoded texts and paratexts. The use of encoded writing to hide the secret messages can be found in many different cultures worldwide (Efing and Arich-Gerz 2017, 169–200; Kahn 1996, 71–105). The origin of Siamese code tradition also needs further discussion and attention among modern scholars of Thai language and literature. Remaining questions include whether the codes in Siamese manuscripts derive from other traditions, such as Pāli and Sanskrit (and other vernacular languages) in India, and to what extent Siamese codes are related to codes in the neighboring cultures, particularly Lan Na. Interestingly, Lan Na manuscript culture in the northern part of Thailand features codes, known as *yutta sara*, with numerals and dots representing consonants and vowels (Figure 33).

The rules of this Lan Na code are close to *fon saen ha* and *fòng hu chang* (Sanan Thammathi 2001, 1–12). However, there are no academic works directly discussing the relationships with other manuscript cultures.

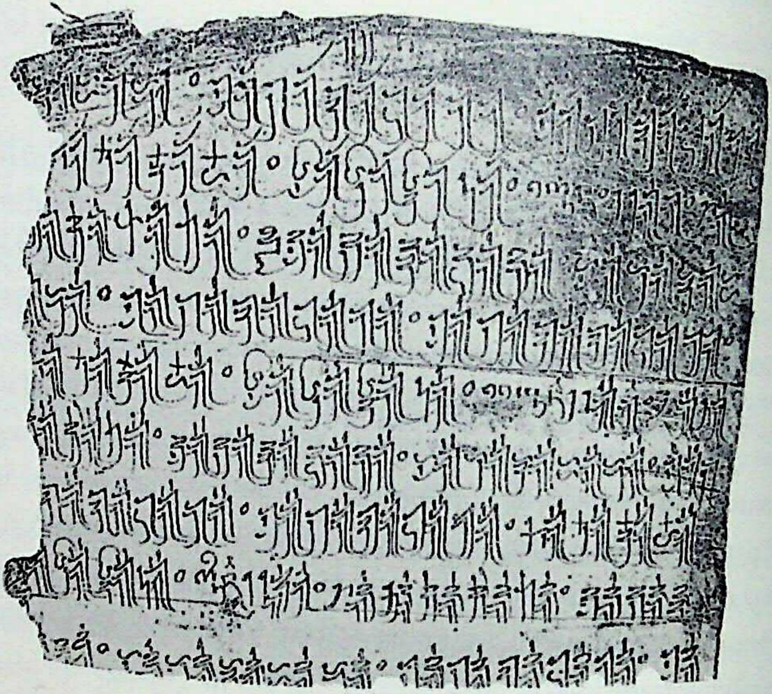

**Figure 33:** An example of a *yutta sara* code in Lan Na manuscript culture. (Sanan Thammathi, 2001: 37)

This chapter serves as an introduction to the Siamese tradition of encoded texts and paratexts to help scholars and students of Siamese manuscripts to recognize each type of code when confronting them in manuscripts. I hope that this will lead to more evidence on codes and to further discussions on this topic with the aim of deepening our understanding of the Siamese code tradition.

## Endnote: Decoding the Hidden Words

1. Originally presented at the 33rd Conference on Oriental Studies in Germany (33. Deutscher Orientalistenstag 2017) at the Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena (Germany) on September 21, 2017.
2. The line numbers in the captions of each figure correspond to the line in each figure, not to pages in the original manuscripts.
3. The mnemonic poem does not mention this additional pair but these letters are present in the paradigm.

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*จินดามณี*

*Palm-leaf manuscript of the treatise on traditional sexology*. Palm-leaf manuscript, incised and infused with black ink, Thai script, Thai language. [Privat Collection; Uncatalogued] (Courtesy of Aphilak Kasempholkoon and Boontuean Sriworapot for my access to the digital copy of the manuscript.)
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*ดุษฎีสังเวยกล่อมช้าง*

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*บุณโณวาทคำฉันท์*

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*โลกนิติ*

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*จินดามณี*

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# Sacred Literacy: An Overview of Multilingual Siamese Grantha Manuscripts

MANASICHA AKEPIYAPORNCHAI &
PEERA PANARUT

## Introduction

Siamese manuscript culture has been dominated by Theravada Buddhism and such languages as vernacular Thai and canonical Pāli, at least since production of the earliest extant manuscripts.[1] Remnants of Brahmanical tradition in Sanskrit and Tamil are also evident in Siamese manuscript culture, despite gaining little scholarly attention to date. This chapter is an overview of this corpus, re-examining multilingual Siamese Grantha manuscripts used by the Brahmanical priests of Bangkok for ceremonial and ritual purposes. It explores the multilingual and ritual characteristics of the manuscript corpus and demonstrates the uniqueness of this manuscript subculture. Siamese Grantha manuscripts are Brahmanical ceremonial and ritual texts that feature three languages: Sanskrit, Tamil, and Thai. They are written in a variation of the South Indian Grantha script, which resembles scripts from South India, especially Grantha Tamil. The script and languages, as well as the texts they notate, render Siamese Grantha manuscripts one of the most astonishing corpora within Siamese manuscript culture, reflecting its Brahmanical influence.

Quaritch Wales first focused attention on the Siamese Grantha script through his now-classic work, *State Ceremonies of Siam* (1931). The book provides information on the use of Siamese Grantha manuscripts in the royal court, appending a list of seven manuscripts written in this script. J. R. Marr's article entitled "Some Manuscripts in Grantha Script from Bangkok" (1969) elaborates on the form and orthography of Siamese Grantha and includes the Tamil texts in its corpus. Through facsimiles of the manuscripts kept at the National Library of Thailand in Bangkok, Neelakanta Sarma (1972) offers transliterations of texts from Siamese Grantha to modern Devanagari, Grantha Tamil, and (modern) Tamil, listing the original title of each text in Sanskrit and Tamil (1972, 166–167). Sarma's handwritten transliterations were published as *Textes Sanskrits et Tamouls de Thailande*, with an introduction in French by Jean Filliozat. As the title suggests, Sarma prioritizes Sanskrit and Tamil texts over their manuscripts. Despite its significance, this work targets modern Sanskrit and Tamil scholars and is less studied in the Thai literary sphere.

The earliest Grantha study in Thai appeared in 1931: *Rai Ngan Samruat Tamra Phra Ratcha Phithi Phram Sayam* (Survey on Siamese Brahmanical Ceremonial Treatises) by P. Subrahmanya Shastri.[2] This work cites the circulation among the Brahmanical priests of Thailand of Sanskrit and Tamil texts in the Grantha script based on seven Grantha manuscripts. Unfortunately, Shastri's work has not been further developed by Thai researchers. However, scholars of Thai literature might know the script from studies on the early Thai poem, *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* (Oath of Allegiance on Water), which was published in the Siamese Grantha script by Wudhichai Kosolkanjana (1988) and Niyada Lausoonthorn (1992). Such studies in Siamese Grantha focus mainly on the script and texts. Aspects of manuscript culture need still need further discussion.

Siamese Brahmanical culture remains obscure, and secondary literature on this topic relies largely on previous studies. Reiteration of existing knowledge does not contribute to better insights into the continuity of and changes to Brahmanical culture in Thailand. Accordingly, this chapter explores Siamese Grantha manuscripts in three languages, which arguably represent one of the most salient remnants of Brahmanical culture in Thailand.

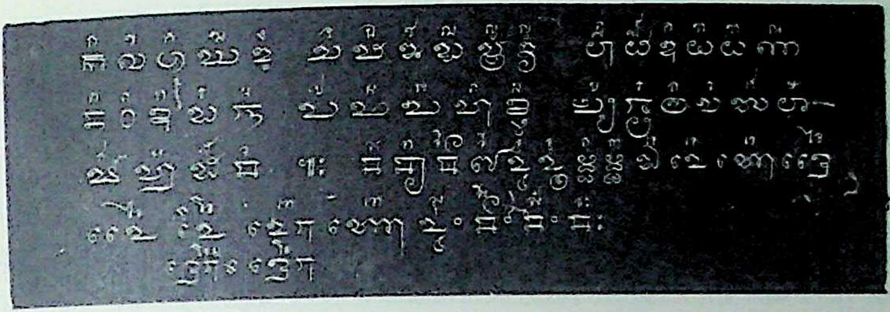


Figure 1: An alphabetic chart for Decorative Siamese Grantha with equivalents in the Thai script, first published in Marr (1969), from a manuscript kept at the National Library of Thailand. (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 613, verso p. 58)

## Brahmanical culture in Siam

Indian culture has influenced various aspects of Southeast Asia, such as beliefs, languages, literature, and social formation. This was particularly true prior to the advent of nation-states. This influence does not affect every area in the same manner. Importantly, Indian culture changed to a certain extent as it entered and merged with each community.

Indian culture has played a role in the political and social formation and development of Siam since the time of Sukhothai (Wales 1931, 12–20). Sukhothai, which later became Thailand, was the early Siamese kingdom from the 13th century to the early 15th century. The influence is even more evident during the Ayutthaya kingdom (1352–1767), when Indian culture was manifest in literary, religious, and social domains. Although other cultures simultaneously thrived in Siam, Indian culture served as a defining factor for high culture in a cosmopolitan domain (Baker and Phongpaichit 2017, 203). A clear example is Brahmanical culture, a subset of Indian culture that is closely associated with the royal court and kingship. Wales (1931, 60) asserts that Siam was influenced by culture from both India and Angkorian Khmer, another powerful kingdom neighboring Siam. Brahmanical priests were recruited from different areas within Siam and from these two adjacent kingdoms during this period (Kanjana 1996, 58–86).[3]

Siamese Brahmanical culture centers on Brahmanical beliefs, scriptures, and rituals, which form the sacred identity of a king and the hierarchical relationship between royalty and subjects. It is integrally linked to and maintained by a group of Brahmanical priests and their literature. The multilingual Siamese Grantha manuscripts investigated in this chapter form part of that literature. The manuscripts are ritual manuals and prayers, used and circulated mostly within a circle of Brahmanical priests and a group of educationally and politically influential people (Kanjana 1996, 52). Their role at the court became more important through elaborate Brahmanical rituals and ceremonies, closely related to the king, such as the coronation ceremony and the swing ceremony, this chapter also examines literary portrayals, including traditional treatises on royal ceremonies (*tamra phra ratcha phithi*) and the classic explanatory work, *Phra Ratcha Phithi Sip Sòng Düan* (Ceremonies of Twelve Months), by King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V; r. 1868–1910).

Brahmanical culture functioned in Siam, where Buddhism was a social foundation. However, unlike Buddhism, which is both accessible to people in general and plays a role in the royal court context, Brahmanical culture was dominated by Brahmanical priests and people related to the court. This domination was even more striking during the Bangkok period. In the wake of the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, Brahmanical culture was revived mainly by people from the highest levels of society to imbue a form of sacredness.

After the fall of Ayutthaya, Brahmins and Brahmanical priests were recruited, respectively from India and the Southern part of Siam. One key area of recruitment for the latter was Nakhòn Si Thammarat (Wales 1931, 60), where evidence of South Indian communities since the very early period is attested through inscriptions in Tamil dating from the 7th and 9th centuries (Cœdès 1929, 32, 38). However, the number of Brahmanical priests and practices in society decreased from the late

18th century. The limited accessibility and intelligibility of Brahmanical practices were evident, even for the upper echelons of society. This is reflected in *Phra Ratcha Phithi Sip Sòng Düan* (Chulalongkorn, 2009), which interprets the role of Brahmanical priests in Siam and their practices through the Western and generalized notion of Brahmins and Indian Hinduism. This attempt to map the culture from mainland India onto the Brahmanical culture in Siam suggests the obscurity of the Brahmanical practices around that time (Chulalongkorn 2009, 504–508).

The Brahmanical priests, whose ancestors came from India, had served in the Siamese court for centuries under the Department of Court Brahmanical Priests. Their tasks included serving as jurors in the traditional court and conducting Brahmanical state ceremonies (Kanjana 1996, 19–20; Wales 1931, 54–60). Brahmanical priests still perform royal ceremonies of the court.[4] The Siamese Grantha manuscripts of the ritual texts used in ceremonies by the Brahmanical priests of Bangkok date back to the 19th century. Nowadays, the main temple or Devasathan of the court Brahmanical priests of Bangkok — the Brahmanical Temple — is located near Wat Suthat monastery, facing the Giant Swing[5] in Bangkok. The advent of Grantha manuscript culture in Siam is unclear; early evidence is scarce. The only surviving evidence dates from the Bangkok period. The Grantha script may have already been used and developed in southern Thailand prior to recruitment of Brahmanical priests to serve the royal court of Bangkok.

The corpus of this study features 17 Siamese Grantha manuscripts, 14 of which are kept at the National Library of Thailand in Bangkok. Some were donated to the National Library by high-ranking Brahmanical priests in the early 20th century (P. Subrahmanya Shastri 1931, 17–21). These manuscripts thus originate from Devasathan and the Brahmanical community in Bangkok. Two additional manuscripts are housed at the National Library of Thailand in the southern province of Nakhòn Si Thammarat. Both manuscripts, which preserve the ritual texts for the ordination of Brahmanical priests, are badly damaged. Nevertheless, these two manuscripts confirm the existence of the Siamese Grantha tradition in Nakhòn Si Thammarat, the southern province where the Brahmanical community has been established for centuries. Modern scholars believe Nakhòn Si Thammarat to be the origin of the Brahmanical lineage of the Bangkok royal court. In addition to manuscripts found in Thailand, one Siamese Grantha manuscript is kept at the Bavarian State Library of Munich (Germany). The total number of manuscripts in the corpus does not represent the entire corpus of Siamese Grantha manuscripts, as a number are kept by the Brahmanical priests at Devasathan for contemporary rituals and ceremonies. Unfortunately, the Devasathan's collection is not accessible for the public, except for one manuscript of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam*, which has already been edited and studied (Wudhichai 1988; Niyada 1992).

## Siamese Grantha: A sacred and restricted script

The Grantha script has been referred to as *chiang khrün*[6] (irregular Grantha) and as *chiang phram* (irregular [script of] Brahmanical priests). The first term suggests the relationship with the South Indian Grantha tradition, while the latter points to Brahmanical priests, the users of the script. The form and orthography of the script correspond to South Indian Grantha, strongly adapted to the form and orthography of Thai and Khòm scripts. The script is referred to herein as "Siamese Grantha." This adaptation to the Siamese manuscript culture renders Siamese Grantha as one of the most specific scripts that can be accessed only by a limited group of Siamese Brahmanical priests, not by regular Siamese or South Indian readers.

As previously stated, the Siamese Grantha script resembles Grantha Tamil, suggesting a close relationship to the Grantha tradition of South

India. Traditionally, the two scripts were used together in Tamil Nadu: regular Tamil for Tamil texts and Grantha Tamil (sometimes also Tamilian Grantha; see Ciotti and Franceschini 2016) for writing Sanskrit and hybrid Tamil-Sanskrit texts. Grantha Tamil contains a number of additional characters required for Sanskrit, not differentiated in the regular Tamil script and unknown to Tamil phonetics (Wilden 2011, 121). Grantha script used in Thailand was developed from the Grantha tradition, not from regular Tamil tradition; the related Tamil characters and orthography have scarcely been found in Tamil texts from Siamese Grantha manuscripts.

In the traditional system of Siamese education, children were trained in two main scripts: Thai for vernacular texts and Khòm for canonical Pāli texts and vernacular religious texts. The tradition of learning Grantha, excluded from traditional Siamese monastic education, was limited to Brahmanical priests. The script is manifest in two variants: Ordinary Grantha, which is more cursive; and Decorative Grantha, which is more angular and affiliated with Khòm (Marr 1969, 282–284). Grantha form and script are sometimes included in a genre of secular treatises called *tamra aksòn tang tang* (treatises on various scripts), which compile the alphabets and orthography of different foreign and irregular scripts. However, the Grantha script found in such treatises is presented in deviated forms, significantly different from those found in actual Brahmanical manuscripts (Figures 2–5). The scribes of these treatises on various scripts did not belong to Brahmanical communities and were not directly trained in Siamese Grantha script. Furthermore, treatises on various scripts classify Grantha into two subgroups: *chiang khrün* (corresponding to Decorative Grantha) and *chiang phram* (Ordinary Grantha). The inclusion of two categories of the Grantha script in the treatises suggests that two variations of Siamese Grantha had already been acknowledged among the Siamese scribes during the traditional period, though seemingly not widely mastered.

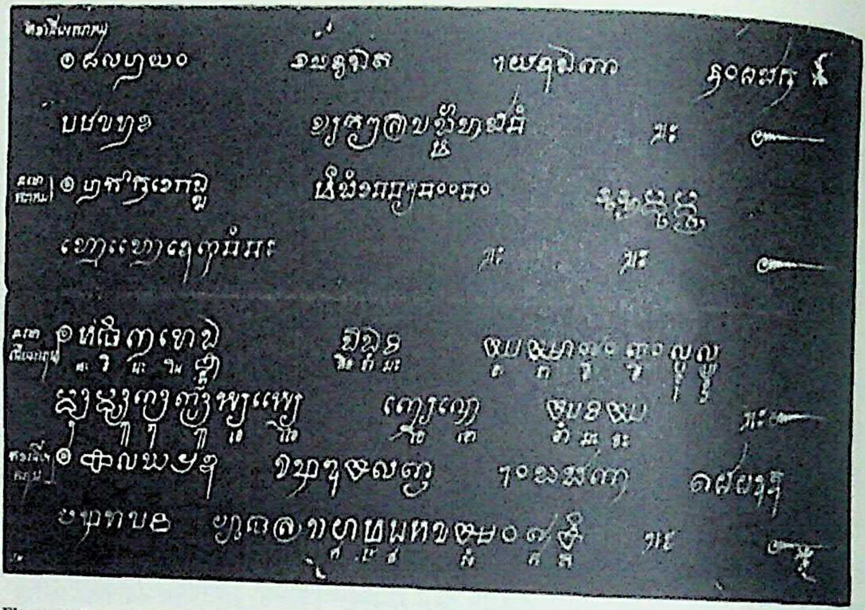


**Figure 2:** The alphabet and orthography of Siamese Grantha, classified as *chiang phram* and *chiang khrün*, from a traditional treatise on various scripts. (National Library of Thailand, Illustrated Manuscript Subsection, Ms. no. 153, verso pp. 14–15)

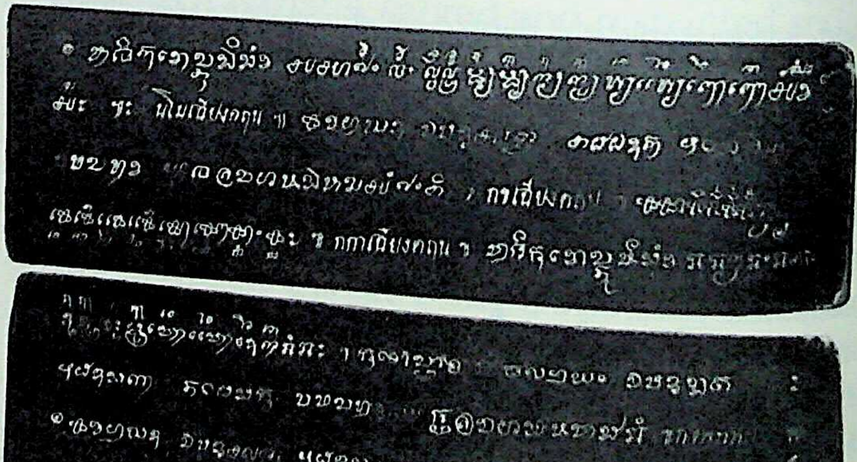


**Figure 3:** The alphabet and orthography of Siamese Grantha classified as *chiang khrün* and *chiang phram* from a traditional treatise on various scripts. (National Library of Thailand, Illustrated Manuscript Subsection, Ms. no. 150, recto pp. 5–6)

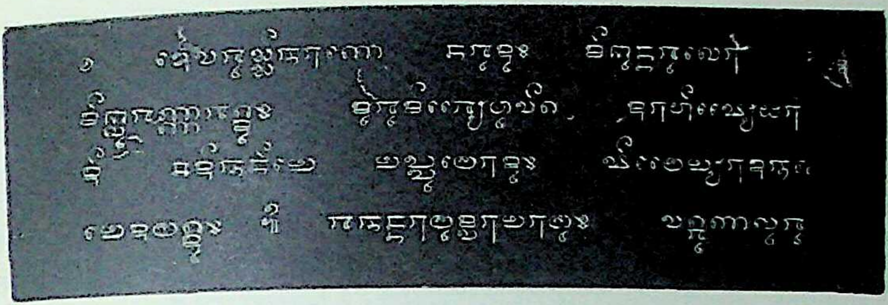


**Figure 4:** The Siamese Decorative Grantha script from an actual Brahmanical manuscript notating the Tamil mantras, called *Pit Pratu Siwalai* (Closing the Gate of the Abode of Siwa). (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668, verso p. 56)

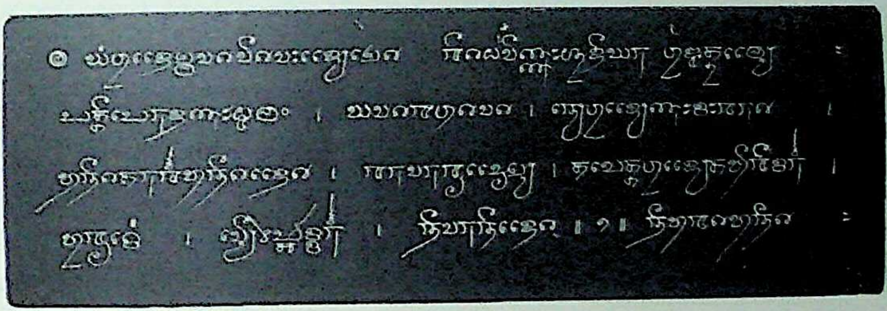


**Figure 5:** The Siamese Ordinary Grantha script from an actual Brahmanical manuscript notating the Tamil mantras called *Poet Pratu Siwalai* (Opening the Gate of the Abode of Siwa). (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 667, verso p. 4.)

Although the scripts were not extensively known or learned in the traditional education system, Brahmanical temple priests were rigorously trained to read and write Siamese Grantha (Kanjana 1996, 132). The tradition of learning the Siamese Grantha script continues among court Brahmanical priests today. Interestingly, Pāli verses are also chanted in some ceremonies and occasionally appear in Grantha manuscripts (Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 258; Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 653). Court Brahmanical priests are trained to read and write the Khòm script too, along with Siamese Grantha in both Decorative and Ordinary styles (Chawin Rangsiphrammanakul, the Supreme Court Brahmin; Interviewed: September 5, 2015). Both Ordinary and Decorative Siamese

Grantha scripts are present in the corpus of 17 manuscripts, though Ordinary Grantha dominates. Decorative Grantha is used in only 5 of the manuscripts.

The form and orthography of Siamese Grantha have been clarified by scholars of previous generations. An introductory discussion on script form in relation to South Indian counterparts can be found in Marr's "Some Manuscripts in Grantha Script from Bangkok" (1969), which focuses on scripts used for Tamil texts. Marr also provides an alphabetic chart for Decorative Grantha[7] and remarks on obscure forms and orthography. A comprehensive introduction of the adaptation of the Grantha script in writing Thai texts is provided by Wudhichai Kosolkanjana (1989) and Niyada Lausoonthorn (1992), based on the manuscripts of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam*. However, the corpus does incorporate variations of orthography.

The Khòm script was used for preserving religious texts (in Pāli and sometimes Thai) and has been perceived as the sacred script in the Buddhist community in Thailand (Santi and Nawarat 2018, 45). The Siamese Grantha script was used for preserving ritual manuals and prayers in Sanskrit and Tamil, mainly among court Brahmanical priests. As these officials constitute a small portion of those with Brahmin blood lineage. Siamese Grantha literacy is arguably the most restricted of the three scripts used in traditional Siamese manuscript culture. The form and orthography of the Siamese Grantha script intrinsically limit accessibility. Although Siamese Grantha resembles its South Indian predecessor, it is an adapted form incorporating orthographic elements from Thai and Khòm scripts. Some Siamese Grantha consonants, such as *ḍa*, have a perfect counterpart in the Khòm script, in this case [8] (Wudhichai Kosolkanjana 1988, 100); the consonant *ḍa* looks completely different in South Indian Grantha (Grantha Tamil) (Grünendahl 2001, 2, 80, 122). Furthermore, the numerals in the Siamese Grantha script are the same as those in the Thai and Khòm tradition. Hence, Siamese Grantha is not easily recognizable for Grantha readers. Neither can regular readers in Siamese culture who are only familiar with Thai and Khòm scripts understand this writing. The readership of Siamese Grantha is thus restricted to a small group of Siamese court Brahmanical priests trained in Siamese Grantha literacy.

## Siamese Grantha manuscripts: A multilingual corpus

Although texts in Sanskrit and Tamil and their script form clearly suggest a relationship with the South Indian Brahmanical tradition, writing support and book format for Siamese Grantha follows Siamese tradition, namely *khòi*-paper leporello manuscripts. Palm-leaf manuscripts are the common traditional supports of South India, while paper slowly began to replace palm leaf in Tamil Nadu from the late 19th century (Wilden 2011, 118). *Khòi* manuscripts comprise a long piece of paper made from the bark of the *khòi* tree (*Streblus asper*) (Kongkaew 2010, 3–20), folded in leporello or accordion fashion. They are sometimes referred to in English as folded books (Gau, 1979, 20). In the case of blackened *khòi* manuscripts (*samut thai dam*) and other dark papers, yellow or white ink or white steatite pencil are used for writing. Black ink is used for greyish *khòi* manuscripts (*samut thai khao*) as it contrasts well with a white or greyish backgrounds. Generally, Siamese Grantha manuscripts survive as blackened *khòi* manuscripts inscribed with yellow ink, though greyish *khòi* manuscripts are also found.

The corpus of Siamese Grantha manuscripts consists of collections of ritual and ceremonial texts in various languages. A manuscript usually contains more than one text arranged as an anthology in the context of Brahmanical rituals. Furthermore, several manuscripts may make up different volumes of a set of manuscripts. For example, three manuscripts in the Decorative Grantha script from the National Library of Thailand (Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 360; Royal Ceremonial Treatises

Subsection, Ms. nos. 668, 672) might form a set of related ceremonial texts. Specifically, these three manuscripts share the same handwriting style and substance and manuscript size (portrait; 11.8 cm by 36.7 cm). According to P. Subrahmanya Shastri (1931, 3), who interviewed the Brahmanical priests in Bangkok around 1930, these manuscripts were copied by Phra Khru Atsadacan (Plòt Sawatdivethin), a high-ranking Brahmanical priest of the Siamese court and a scribe of Siamese Grantha manuscripts.

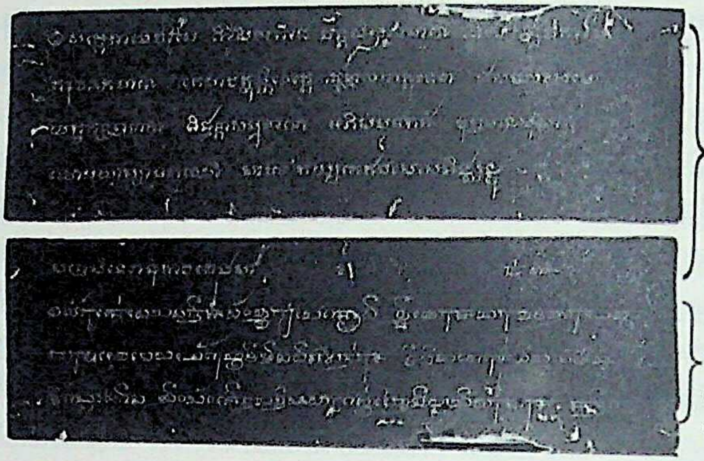
As an anthology of ritual texts, a single Siamese Grantha manuscript can compile various texts in Sanskrit, Tamil, and Thai. Sanskrit appears most frequently in these anthologies. Some anthologies seem incomplete, despite their fine physical condition. For example, one manuscript in the Ordinary Grantha script (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 667) contains a Tamil prayer known as *Poet Pratu Siwalai* (Opening the Gate of the Abode of Siwa), while the related *Pit Pratu Siwalai* (Closing the Gate of the Abode of Siwa), expected to be present in the following volume, is absent from any extant manuscript of the corpus. Fortunately, the complete version of *Pit Pratu Siwalai* appears in another manuscript — Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668 — although compiled in a different arrangement of texts. This reflects the different methods in arranging anthologies, probably by different compilers. *Bucha Bencakhap* (Sanskrit: *pūjā-pañca-gavya*) is a set of Sanskrit instructions for a purification ritual involving consumption of five products derived from cows; it is included in at least three different Siamese Grantha manuscripts (Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 360; Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. nos. 593, 672), featuring different texts in different anthologies. Most manuscripts in the corpus contain more than one text. This can be interpreted as the intention of the editors or compilers rather than coincidence.

The cover titles of several manuscripts contain the phrase *tang tang* (ต่างๆ; various), implying the compilation of various texts from various sources. For example, the cover title of one manuscript (Royal Ceremonial

Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 672) is *Phra Ratcha Phithi Tang Tang* (พระราชพิธีต่างๆ; various royal ceremonies), while another (Bavarian State Library of Munich, Cod. Siam 99) is *Wet Tang Tang* (เวทต่างๆ; various Vedic [verses]). These cover titles indicate that the texts in these two manuscripts derive from different sources, but have been compiled under a common theme, such as verses for various royal ceremonies (Ms. no. 672) or various mantras generically labelled as Vedic verses (Cod. Siam 99). Anthologization, or the process of compiling and arranging different texts in a multiple-text manuscript, of Brahmanical texts is a significant feature of Siamese Grantha manuscript culture. The main part of this corpus consists of anthology manuscripts. A multiple-text manuscript in the Siamese Grantha corpus also functions as a "corpus organizer," where the contents selected and compiled by the scribes and scholars are assigned to a specific arrangement (Bausi 2016, 128).

There is one rare case of a single-text manuscript in the Siamese Grantha corpus, namely: a manuscript of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* (*Lilit* Subsection, Ms. no. 259). This manuscript, which is in good physical condition, contains only the text of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam;* the rest of the manuscript is blank.

In addition to being multilingual, the Siamese Grantha manuscripts are multiscriptual, using various scripts in one codicological unit. In several cases, the Thai script is incorporated in texts and paratexts. Importantly, Pāli passages are sometimes included in Siamese Grantha anthologies, but are written in Khòm script. For instance, the Pāli verse inviting the gods is part of the royal ceremony of allegiance oath (*phra ratcha phithi thü nam phra phiphat sattaya*; พระราชพิธีถือน้ำพระพิพัฒน์สัตยา) and thus is included in a Siamese Grantha anthology of texts related to this ceremony (Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 258). Other passages in the Thai language are written in Siamese Grantha, while a short Pāli verse is written in the Khòm script (Figure 6). The use of the Khòm script suggests that the Siamese Grantha script might have never been adapted to notate Pāli language, despite having been employed to notate Thai language.



Pali verses in Khòm script

The first line starts with: *sagge kame ca rūpe*

Thai prose in Grantha script

The first line starts with: ๑ ข้าแต่เทพนิกรธั้งหลายเปนอาดิ

**Figure 6: A Pāli verse written in the Khòm script, followed by Thai texts written in Siamese Grantha. (National Library of Thailand, Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 258, verso pp. 2–3)**

Unfortunately, the dates of Siamese Grantha manuscripts are rarely attested. The earliest dated manuscript is an anthology of various ritual texts used for the royal ceremony of allegiance oath (Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 258). As King Mongkut is mentioned (Figure 7), the manuscript can be dated during his reign (1851–1868). The earliest Siamese Grantha manuscript dated precisely is a collection of Sanskrit and Tamil prayers (including *Poet Pratu Siwalai*; Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 667); a scribal colophon in the Thai script gives the date as 1875 (Figure 8).

The most recent manuscript in the corpus is a collection of ritual texts in Thai, Pāli, and Sanskrit (in three scripts: Thai, Khòm, and Siamese Grantha), dated in 1919 (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 653, verso p. 80). The colophon at the end reads: "The copy was completed on July 29, 2464 BE [1919]. I, "Nai Thòng Choetthòrani", copied the (traditional) manuscript-book borrowed from Khun Phrom Thewan of Nakhòn Si Thammarat. The exemplar has been returned to its owner." (คัดแล้วเสร็จวันที่ ๒๙ กรกฎาคม พ.ศ. ๒๔๖๔ ข้าพเจ้า นายทอง เชิดธรณี คัดหนังสือไทย ยืมจากขุนพรหมเทวันเมืองนครศรีธรรมราชมาคัด ต้นฉบับส่งเจ้าของแล้ว). It is not certain whether the scribe, Nai Thòng Choetthòrani, wrote the

Siamese Grantha passages in the manuscript himself, but the use and circulation of the Grantha script in Nakhòn Si Thammarat is mentioned in this colophon. Though the exemplar owned by Khun Phrom Thewan has not yet been found, this manuscript dated 1919 is evidence of the Siamese Grantha tradition, which continued into the early 20th century.

The other manuscripts are undated, but are unlikely to be earlier than 19th century. One Siamese Grantha manuscript on ordination ritual texts (in Sanskrit) of Brahmanical priests was found in Nakhòn Si Thammarat (Ms. no. 461). It contains a set of ceremonial instructions (Thai language and script) that refers to 1693. This figure might indicate the date of composition or compilation, rather than the date of manuscript production. However, it could indicate the existence of Brahmanical rituals in Nakhòn Si Thammarat from the late Ayutthaya period, around the late 17th century.

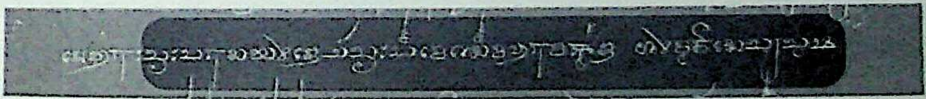


**Figure 7:** A passage from the Announcement of Allegiance Oath (prose in Thai language) mentioning King Mongkut. This line reads: พระบาธสมเฑจ์พระบรเมนธรมหามกุฑ สมมุติเธพยพาง (His Majesty King Mongkut Sommut Thepphayaphong). (National Library of Thailand, Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 258, verso p. 10, line 3)

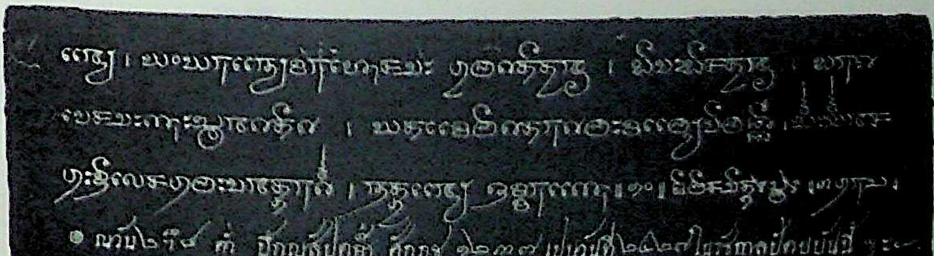


**Figure 8:** The colophon giving the manuscript date is written in the Thai script, following a Tamil mantra text called *Pit Pratu Krailat* (in the Siamese Grantha script). (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 667, verso p. 38.)

The colophon (fourth line of the figure) reads: ๏ ณวัน ๒ฯ๓ ๘ ค่ำ ปีกุญ สัปตศั่ก ศักราช ๑๒๓๗ เปนวันที่ ๒๔๒๗ ในรัชกาลปัตยุบันนี้ ฯ; [The manuscript was finished] on Monday the third waxing day of the eighth lunar month in the Year of the Pig, the seventh year of the decade, the seventh year of the reign, in 1237 Cunlasakkarat, on the day of the current reign. The date here is equivalent to Monday July 5, 1875.

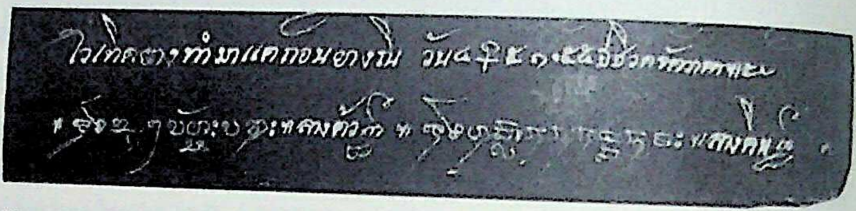


**Figure 9:** A passage in Thai language mentioning the date of the text from a Siamese Grantha manuscript from Nakhòn Si Thammarat. (Nakhòn Si Thammarat, National Library of Thailand, Ms no. 461, recto p. 4, lines 3–4.)

The first line of the figure above reads: [ลูกหลานพึงรู้] ไวเทิดยางทำมาแตกอน ยางณี วัน ๔ฯ๑ ๕ ๑๐๕๕ ปีชวดจัตวาศก ฯ; [children must be aware] of this [ritual instruction] text being practiced as clarified on Wednesday the first waxing day of the fifth month in 1055 Cunlasakkarat [Friday, 26 March 1694], the Year of the Rat, the fourth year of the decade.

The 17 manuscripts of the corpus are summarized in the table below.

## Table: Siamese Grantha manuscripts included in this study

| No. | Current Location | Manuscript Shelfmark | Writing Support/ Writing Substance | Scripts/ Languages | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 258 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ white pencil | Ordinary Grantha, Khòm/ Thai, Pāli | Anthology of the Royal Ceremony of Allegiance Oath<br>• *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* (Thai language/Grantha script)<br>• Verses Inviting Gods (Pāli language/Khòm script)<br>• Announcement of Allegiance Oath (Prose in Thai language/ Grantha script, mentions King Mongkut) |
| 2 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 259 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink and white pencil | Ordinary Grantha/Thai | • *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* (Thai language/Grantha script) |
| 3 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Lilit Subsection, Ms. no. 360 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Decorative Grantha/ Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai | Anthology of Brahmanical Ritual Texts (entitled *Phra Ratcha Phithi Tripavai*)<br>• *Bucha Bencakhap*<br>• *Bucha Sang*<br>• *Bucha Krot*<br>• *Bucha Kum*<br>• *Bucha Khao Wet*<br>• *Poet Pratu Siwalai Kaeo Krilat*<br>• *Ongkan Chang Nam* |
| 4 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 590 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ white pencil | Ordinary Grantha/Thai | Treatise on the Coronation Ceremony (Prose in Thai) |
| 5 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 593 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Ordinary Grantha/ Sanskrit, Thai | Anthology of Brahmanical Ritual Texts (untitled)<br>• Drawing on Ritual Elements<br>• *Phra Attama Wisut*<br>• *Bucha Bencakhap* |
| 6 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 594 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Ordinary Grantha/ Sanskrit, Thai | Anthology of Brahmanical Ritual Texts (untitled)<br>• *Phra Attama Wisut*<br>• *Pratchaya Bucha*<br>• *Phra Ratcha Phithi Sip Sòng Dùan* (Thai language/Thai and Grantha scripts)<br>• *Buat Phrot* |

| No. | Current Location | Manuscript Shelfmark | Writing Support/ Writing Substance | Scripts/ Languages | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 595 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Ordinary Grantha/ Sanskrit, Thai | *Bucha Kun* |
| 8 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 598 | Greyish *khòi* manuscript/ black ink | Ordinary Grantha/Thai | Anthology of Old Elephant Treatises<br>• *Kham Chan Dutsadi Sangwoei*<br>• *Kham Chan Klòm Chang*<br>• *Kham Chan Khotchakam Prayun* |
| 9 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 653 | Greyish *khòi* manuscript/ black ink | Decorative Grantha, Khòm, Thai/Sanskrit, Pāli, Thai | Anthology of Brahmanical Ritual Texts (entitled *Phra Ratcha Phithi Sip Sòng Düan*, dated 1919)<br>• *Bucha Tophat*<br>• *Phra Awisut*<br>• Drawing on Ritual Elements and Settings<br>• Talismanic Patterns |
| 10 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 667 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Ordinary Grantha/ Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai | Anthology of Brahmanical Ritual Texts (untitled, dated 1875)<br>• *Poet Pratu Siwalai*<br>• *Poet Pratu Krailat*<br>• *Pit Pratu Krailat*<br>• *Khün Bòromma Hong* |
| 11 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Decorative Grantha/ Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai | Anthology of Brahmanical Ritual Texts (entitled *Phithi Atta Wisut*)<br>• *Buat Phrot*<br>• *Bucha Murai Bot Yai*<br>• *Bucha Murai Bot Klang*<br>• *Murai Sathan Phra Narai*<br>• Drawing on Ritual Elements<br>• *Buat Phrot 3 Sai 6 Sai*<br>• *Cha Hong*<br>• *Pit Pratu Siwalai* |
| 12 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 671 | Greyish *khòi* manuscript/ black ink | Ordinary Grantha/ Sanskrit, Thai | Anthology of Brahmanical Ritual Texts (entitled *Wet Bucha Thewarup Tang Tang*)<br>• *Anchoen Phra/Wai Phra Sayam Phu* |

| No. | Current Location | Manuscript Shelfmark | Writing Support/ Writing Substance | Scripts/ Languages | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 672 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Decorative Grantha/ Sanskrit, Thai | Anthology of Brahmanical Ritual Texts (entitled *Phra Ratcha Phithi Tang Tang*)<br>• *Tanto Hangsa Bucha Withi*<br>• *Asato Hangsa Bucha Withi*<br>• *Acarayaphisek*<br>• *Purawo Hangso Nama*<br>• *Bucha Bencakhap* |
| 14 | National Library of Thailand, Bangkok | Illustrated Manuscripts Subsection, Ms. no. 151 | Greyish *khòi* manuscript/ black ink | Ordinary Grantha/ Sanskrit, Thai | Anthology of Mantras (named by the National Library *Katha Huacai Tang Tang*, คาถาหัวใจต่างๆ) |
| 15 | National Library of Thailand, Nakhòn Si Thammarat | Ms. no. 460 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Ordinary Grantha/ Sanskrit, Thai | Treatise on Ordination of Brahmanical Priests (damaged) |
| 16 | National Library of Thailand, Nakhòn Si Thammarat | Ms. no. 461 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ yellow ink | Ordinary Grantha / Sanskrit, Thai | Treatise on Ordination of Brahmanical Priests (damaged, containing a passage of ceremonial instructions in Thai language and script) |
| 17 | Bavarian State Library of Munich (Germany) | Cod. Siam 99 | Blackened *khòi* manuscript/ white ink | Decorative Grantha/ Sanskrit, Thai | Anthology of Mantras (entitled *Wet Tang Tang*) |

This corpus does not include the previously mentioned manuscripts of traditional treatises on various scripts (National Library of Thailand, Illustrated Manuscripts Subsection, Ms. nos. 150, 153), in which the alphabet and basic orthography of the Siamese Grantha script are given without any actual text. Furthermore, the full number of manuscripts in the collection of Devasathan, the Brahmanical Temple in Bangkok, is unknown; only one manuscript of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* is publically available to date. P. Subrahmanya Shastri (1931: 14–15, 20) mentions several additional Siamese Grantha manuscripts on ritual texts, found in such other provinces of southern Thailand as Phatthalung and Trang. However, these manuscripts have not been identified. Notwithstanding omissions, this Siamese Grantha manuscript corpus is unique among the manuscript culture of the Thai-Tai speaking world. The Sanskrit and Tamil texts detected along with texts and paratexts in Thai provide dynamics and interactions across different textual and manuscript cultures.

## Sanskrit texts in Siamese Grantha manuscripts

In his study on Siamese Grantha manuscripts in Bangkok, Marr (1969) focuses on Tamil texts. Thus, the Sanskrit texts in the corpus require further research. Sanskrit texts used in the corpus are more varied than Tamil texts derived solely from Tamil *bhakti* scriptures of South India.

Sheldon Pollock (2006) proposed the domination of "Sanskrit cosmopolis" over vernacular languages in South Asia and some parts of Southeast Asia, especially Cambodia. He asserts that Sanskrit played a key role in political and literary domains until the rise of "cosmopolitan vernaculars," which replaced the function of Sanskrit. However, both Sanskrit and Tamil serve important functions in this multilingual corpus of Siamese Grantha manuscripts. They operate within a ritual and ceremonial context along with Thai and Pāli, which dominated society and court, especially during the Early Bangkok period.

Sanskrit texts in Grantha manuscripts can be characterized as prayers and ritual instructions. They derive from or are related to the Vedic tradition in the Siamese Brahmanical context and are generally identified as *Phra Wet*, or the Veda. The majority of Sanskrit texts function as praise-poems to the gods, Śiva, Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, and Gaṇeśa or Gaṇapati being the predominant deities. Specific poetry is devoted to each of the main gods, such as the *Śivastotra* for Śiva and the *Vināyakastotra* for son of Śiva, Ganeśa (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. nos. 667 and 668). In the Indian context, these poems are regarded as a means of pleasing gods for various purposes, symbolizing material offerings in worship. They also embody the devotional attitude of the person praising the gods.[8] The corpus includes a number of praise-poems that are named *nāmastotra*, particularly dedications to Śiva, such as *Śivadvādaśanāmastotra* (Ms. nos. 668 and 667). These are translated in the Appendix. Some sections of prayers are not directed to the gods, such as *Praṇavastotra*, which praises the sacred syllable of *Oṃ* (*praṇava*) (Ms. nos. 667 and 668).

Other Sanskrit texts are instructions for rituals, sometimes including ritual formulas (*mantra*). One example is a set of instructions for a bodily purification ritual for priests involving the consumption of five products derived from cows (*pañca-gavya*; referred to in the manuscript as *Bucha Bencakhap*) (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 672).[9] These instructions presumably are used on a daily basis by Brahmanical priests in Devasathan, where the three main gods are located, as well as in some ceremonies.

Some Sanskrit texts are used collectively in the same ritual, such as a set of prayers grouped together under the title *Phra Ratcha Phithi Cha Hong* (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668). This same set of prayers is included in a collection of texts entitled *Phra Ratcha Phithi Khün Bòromma Hong* (Ms. no. 667). The anthology consists of *Praṇavastotra*, *Ardhanārīnaṭesvarastotra*, *Vināyakastotra*, and *Śivadvādaśanāmastotra*. In the Siamese Grantha corpus, these prayers are normally incorporated in a larger set of texts for a particular ritual, as in the preceding example. The table of manuscripts above also includes a number of Sanskrit texts labelled *Bucha* or worship (*pūjā*), including *Bucha Bencakhap* (Ms. nos. 593 and 672), *Pratchaya Bucha*[10] (Ms. no. 594), and sets of worship texts in Ms. no. 360 (Lilit Subsection). The label *Bucha* indicates various features of Sanskrit texts: it implies an independent text of a ritual instruction; it also signifies a collection of prayers or a combination of prayers and instructions used in a particular ritual. Thus, there seems to be a division between prayers (*stotra*) and worship (*pūjā*) among Siamese Grantha manuscripts that contain Sanskrit texts.

Corruption, omissions, and repetition feature in the Sanskrit texts of this corpus. In some cases, corruption arises from aligning the text with Thai or Pāli pronunciations. It is uncertain whether the Brahmanical priests who use these texts understand their meanings. Nevertheless, Sanskrit has a sacred status for Brahmanical priests. These Sanskrit texts can be used only in specific contexts in Brahmanical rituals and court ceremonies, representing "the language of the gods".[11] As Sarma (1972, IX) rightly indicates, these prayers are not restricted to Brahmins in the context of India. However, they are used only by Brahmanical priests in Siamese ritual contexts. Finally, there are many Sanskrit texts that remain unidentified. Some of these may have been compiled by Brahmanical priests in Siam based on Sanskrit texts circulated in mainland India or Southeast Asia.

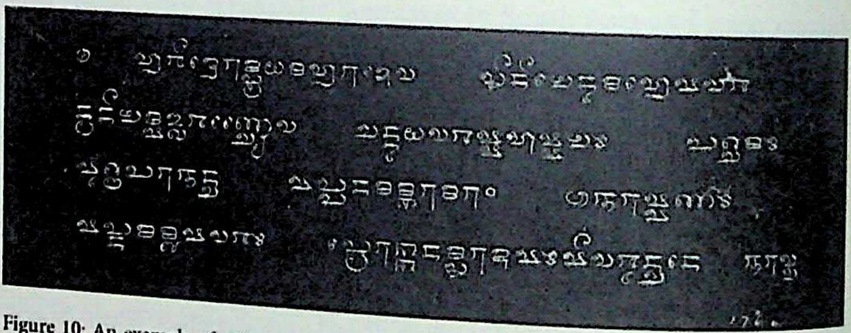


**Figure 10:** An example of a Sanskrit text (*Śivadvādaśanāmastotra*) in Decorative Siamese Grantha script. (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668, verso p. 29)

**Transliteration:**

Line 1 o harioṃpraṭhamahādeva | dhvitiyemaheṣvara
2 tratiyamṣaṅkharaṇcaiva | catuṭhavāṣṣabhaṣṣayam | pancamam
3 ṣunlapānatca | ṣappatamamkāmāṅ | ganāṣṣaṇam
4 ṣaptamamīṣavaram | prokkatatamdhvādaṣamṣivarutcate | nāvva

(See the Appendix for a full transliteration and English translation of the *Śivadvādaśanāmastotra* text from this manuscript.)

## Tamil texts in Siamese Grantha manuscripts

In his comprehensive study on Tamil texts in Siamese Grantha manuscripts, Marr (1969) explores the use of Tamil devotional scriptures with attention to devotional hymns for Śiva, the predominant deity in the Siamese Brahmanical context. The hymns, which are collectively called *Tevāram*, make up the majority of the Tamil texts. This collection of hymns was composed by the first three and most authoritative authors of the Śaiva devotional corpus: Tiruñāṉacampantar (Campantar), Tirunāvukkaracar (Appar), and Cuntaramūrtti (Cuntarar) (Peterson 1989, 3). *Tevāram* is the first part of a larger Śaiva devotional corpus known as *Tirumuṟai*, which was compiled between the 13th and 15th centuries (Peterson 1989, 16). In South India, *Tevāram* is portrayed as devotional and, to a certain extent, sectarian in attitude. Furthermore, the Tamil texts in the Grantha corpus include the *Tiruvēmpāvai* section of *Tiruvācakam*, a collection of hymns penned by another significant Śaiva devotional poet, Maṇikkavācakar, under the title *Bucha Murai Potayai* (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668).[12]

The devotional corpus devoted to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa blossomed in South India around the time of the Śaiva corpus. The corpus is known collectively as *Nālāyiradivyaprabandham*. It was composed by a group of 12 poets called the *āḻvārs* (Peterson 1989, 53). *Tiruvāymoḻi* by Nammāḻvār, the most important author, is predominant among the hymns.[13] A translation of the first canto of Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi* can be found in the Appendix. Marr also refers to *Tiruppāvai*, a set of Vaiṣṇava hymns attributed to Aṇṭāḷ, the only female poet among the *āḻvārs*. She wrote a set of prayers found in *Bucha Murai Potakalang* (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668).[14]

The social and religious dominance of the devotional corpus in South India emerged after the Cōḻa period (Peterson 1989, 14). For example, *Tevāram*, along with prayers invoking the names of gods, was used in worship and rituals in a temple context from the medieval period of

South India (Peterson 1989, 55). Both of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava devotional corpora are available to people other than Brahmins. They are considered as equivalent to the Sanskrit *Veda*, the most authoritative scripture in Brahmanical orthodoxy, by their communities of followers. Recent studies of devotional hymns highlight identification with the local Tamil language, land, and people of the South, in contrast to the pan-Indian Sanskrit language and identity from the north (Peterson, 1989: 6).[15]

However, this sectarian notion and identification no longer underpin Tamil hymns in the Siamese context, whereby a king is identified with both Śiva and Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Only Brahmanical priests repeat the hymns as a ritual formula in court ceremonies related to a king, rather than in daily worship. *Poet Pratu Siwalai* (Opening the Gate of the Abode of Siwa) consists of the first canto of Campantar (*Tirumuṟai* 1.1) and is used in the coronation ceremony (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 667) (Kanjana Suwanwong 1996, 264). The first cantos may represent the whole collection of the author's hymns in the *Tevāram* corpus. The first canto of the collection of hymns by Cuntarar (*Tirumuṟai* 7.1) is featured in *Poet Pratu Krailat* (Opening the Gate of Kailāśa) (Ms. no. 667). The first canto of the collection of hymns by Appar (*Tirumuṟai* 4.1) is found in *Pit Pratu Krailat* (Closing the Gate of Kailāśa) (Ms. no. 667). The first canto of the first decade of *Tiruvāymoḻi* and two invocatory verse forms are grouped under the title *Pit Pratu Siwalai* (Closing the Gate of the Abode of Siwa) (Ms. no. 668), despite being a prayer to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa.[16] Note that the Tamil texts in the Siamese Grantha corpus only focus on these two gods and do not mention other gods. Importantly, no Tamil texts function as ritual instructions.

The function of these hymns does not lie in their meanings. The disregard for the meanings of the hymns partially explains why some are corrupted to an extent that suggests that these Tamil texts were handed down and are preserved without any knowledge of standard Tamil pronunciation. Also, the hymns do not appear in the standard order of the printed editions and there are some omissions (see Marr 1969, 303–306).

Interestingly, Wales refers to a coronation ceremony in which these Tamil hymns are accompanied by prayers in Pāli and then Thai for intelligibility (1931, 83–84). A similar bilingual recitation is performed subsequently to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa (Wales 1931, 85). The Tamil hymns to Śiva and Viṣṇu-Nārayaṇa, *Poet Pratu Siwalai* and *Pit Pratu Siwalai*, are also used in *Trīyampāvāy* and *Trīpāvāy* ceremonies that welcome the gods using the Giant Swing.[17] The highlight of both of the ceremonies is the presence of Śiva on earth. Before the king's coronation, *Poet Pratu Siwalai* is used to invite Śiva to be embodied in the king-to-be (Wales 1931, 86). During the swing ceremony, a nobleman serves as the embodiment of Śiva at the ritual site (Wales 1931, 234). Thus, the Tamil hymns may represent the manifestation of gods, especially Śiva.

The Tamil devotional corpus in South India is available to everyone and is popular among non-Brahmins. In contrast, the use of the Tamil prayers in the Siamese context is restricted to Brahmanical priests, and the audience is limited to the king, royaly, and ministers present on the ceremonial platform. The embodiment of sacredness for Tamil texts relies on limited access secrecy of the recitation. The recitation of Tamil prayers is handed down exclusively through Brahmanical priests, with particular attention to "correct pronunciation." As previously stated, this does not match standardized Tamil pronunciation (Marr 1969, 311). Importantly, Tamil texts are referred to as "Vedic" (Thai: *Phra Wet*) with no differentiation from Sanskrit prayers. Thus, Tamil texts in Siamese Grantha manuscripts traveled far from source to serve only ritual functions and were invested with Vedic sacredness in the Siamese context.

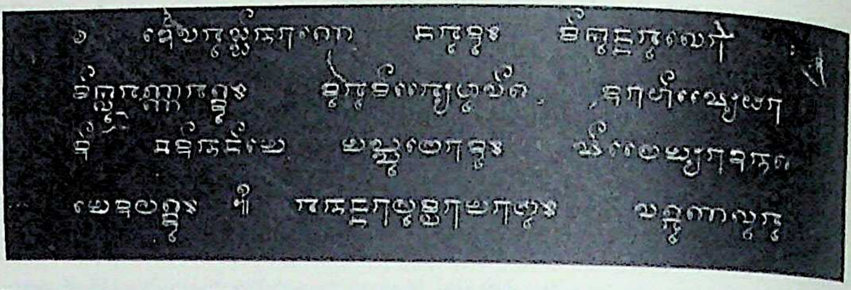


**Figure 11:** An example of a Tamil text (*Pit Pratu Siwalai;* commonly known among modern Tamil scholars as *Tiruvāymoḻi*) in (Decorative) Siamese Grantha script. (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668, verso p. 56)

**Transliteration:**

Line 1. ๏ ḍevarudhdhināṇe tarudum mikuttarukho
2. mikkhuraṇṇarandum murumiraiguvin dāṭiṣaiṭhā
3. di adinatiye yapbulodun ṣilaiyādanan
4. yedalandum |1 ranattālumvāyālum vanruṇakhuru

(See the Appendix for a full transliteration and English translation of *Pit Pratu Siwalai* text from this manuscript.)

# Thai texts and paratexts in Siamese Grantha manuscripts

Thai ritual texts are scarcer because manuscripts written in Siamese Grantha mainly comprise anthologies of Brahmanical ritual texts in Sanskrit and Tamil. Most Thai texts in the corpus are ceremonial texts. Several are transmitted outside the Brahmanical community in the Thai script as well (such as *Ongkan Chaeng Nam*). The Siamese Grantha manuscripts of these vernacular Thai texts reflect their reception by Brahmanical priests, citing the Brahmanical temple as their place of transmission.

A few copies of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam*, the poem used in the royal ceremony of the, can be found in Siamese Grantha manuscripts. The original text was supposedly written by Brahmanical priests in the royal court of the early Ayutthaya kingdom around the 14th century (Cholada Ruengruglikit 2007, 690). During the ceremony, priests recited this text to invite all gods and demons to witness the event and "curse" some water before all attendees — princes, nobles, and officials — swore an oath of allegiance to the king and drank a cup of the water. Due to the involvement of Brahmanical priests, the text of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* has been transmitted in the Siamese Grantha script. Four Grantha copies exist:[18] three are in National Library of Thailand (Bangkok) and included in the corpus (see the Table above); an additional manuscript is in the collection of Devasathan, the Brahmanical Temple (Wudhichai, 1989). Two of the four are single-text manuscripts, preserving only the text of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam*. The other two manuscripts include *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* in anthologies.

The first of these is an anthology of Brahmanical ritual texts written in the Decorative Grantha script (Ms. no. 360) with *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* set among other Sanskrit and Tamil prayers. The other is an anthology of ceremonial texts for the royal ceremony of allegiance oath (Ms. no. 258), including *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* along with Pāli verses inviting gods (in the Khòm script) and *the Announcement of the Oath of Allegiance* in Thai prose (Grantha script). This prose text would be read aloud by the royal scribe after the recital of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* by the Brahmanical priests (Pi Malakul 1972, 4–5). The anthology in this arrangement survives in a number of manuscripts, but almost all written in Thai-Khòm scripts. This manuscript (Ms. no. 258) is the only copy of the anthology that extensively uses Siamese Grantha.

The other case of Ayutthaya literature transmitted in the Siamese Grantha script is a manuscript of *the Anthology of Old Elephant Treatises*. It consists of three different elephant treatises in *kham chan* meter: *Kham Chan Dutsadi Sangwoei* (Ritual Poem for the Elephant Ceremony in *Kham Chan* Meter), *Kham Chan Klòm Chang Krung Kao* (Ritual Poem for Soothing the Elephants from the Old Capital in *Kham Chan* Meter), and *Kham Chan Khotchakam Prayun* (Treatise on Elephants' Features in *Kham Chan* Meter). The first text, *Kham Chan Dutsadi Sangwoei*, is attributed to a poet from the reign of King Narai during the 17th century and was supposedly used for ritual worship before the royal elephant hunting. The second text, *Kham Chan Klòm Chang Krung Kao*, was recited in a ceremony to tame captured wild elephants. These two ritual texts strongly influenced royal ceremonial literature during the Bangkok period, both in form and content (Chairat 2009, 44–45). The third text in this collection, *Kham Chan Khotchakam Prayun*, is in *kham chan* meter. It explains the significance of a family of elephants and their auspicious implications. Arguably, *Kham Chan Khotchakam Prayun* is the one that is not a ritual text, but a treatise on elephant lore. These three elephant treatises were written to serve different purposes: two of the texts were used for rituals pertaining to elephants, while one is a reference on elephants and their lore. Nevertheless, all incorporate knowledge of elephants and have probably been transmitted from the Ayutthaya period.

*The Anthology of Old Elephant Treatises* contains three different texts and survives in 16 extant manuscripts.[19] One of these is written in Siamese Grantha script (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 598). The arrangement of the anthology is identical in all 16 manuscripts. The original compiler of the anthology is unknown. The earliest copy (in the Thai script), dated 1817 and evidently produced by a royal scribe, already follows this arrangement (Chan Subsection, *Kò*, Ms. no. 17). Despite the unclear identity of the compiler, the use of the Grantha script in this manuscript suggests transmission of these texts among Brahmanical priests. Shastri (1931, 1) confirms that this particular manuscript was originally owned by a high-ranking priest, such as Phra Wamathep Muni (Sawang Rangsiphramanakun).

The corpus also includes a manuscript of a treatise on the coronation ceremony. The text, which is incomplete, explains the legend behind the ceremony and provides ceremonial details (Ms. no. 590). In some cases, Thai texts in the Thai script are also inserted among the Sanskrit texts in the Siamese Grantha script, as can be seen in Ms. no. 594 (National Library of Thailand, Ceremonial Treatises Subsection). This manuscript begins with Sanskrit texts *Phra Atta Wisut* and *Pratchaya Bucha* in the Grantha script, followed by a Thai prose text explaining the Ceremonies of Twelve Months in Thai script. However, the names of the ceremonies are written in the Siamese Grantha in the Thai script texts, perhaps to highlight the ceremony names (Figure 12).

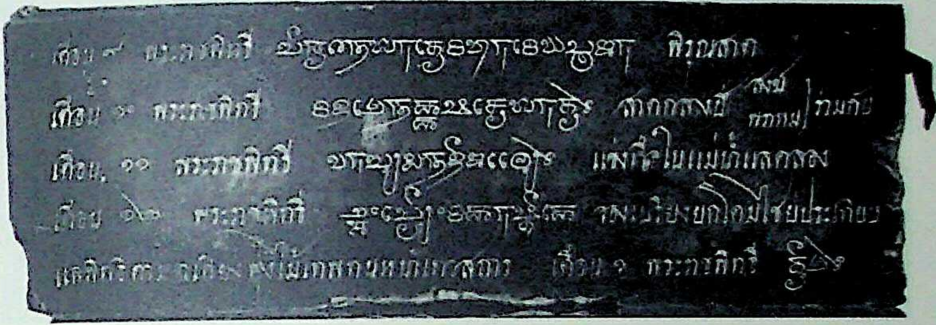


**Figure 12:** Thai text explaining the royal Ceremonies of Twelve Months with ceremony names written in Siamese Grantha script. (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 594, verso p. 39)

In addition to extensive texts in Thai (verse and prose), shorter Thai texts explain the drawings of ritual elements and talismanic patterns. In many cases, these shorter texts are also written in the Siamese Grantha script (Figures 13–14), mainly functioning as captions.

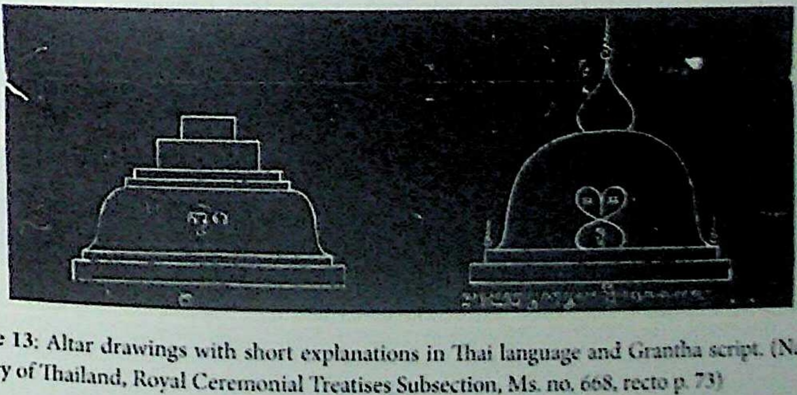


**Figure 13:** Altar drawings with short explanations in Thai language and Grantha script. (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668, recto p. 73)

**Transliteration:**
Left: กูน (fireplace)
Right (above): m $_{u}$ $^{a}$ Right (below): บพนไต(บรรพต)บูชาทูปเทียนดอกไม
'the mountain for worshipping with incenses and flowers'

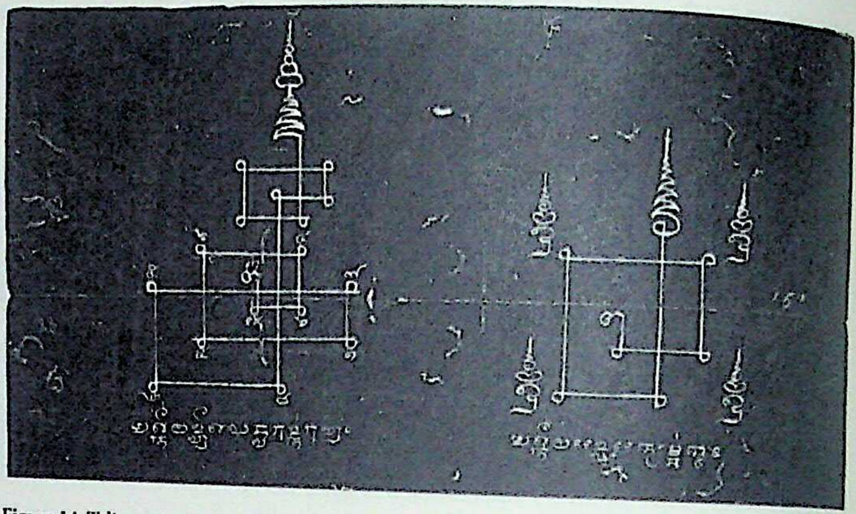


**Figure 14:** Talismanic patterns with short explanations in Thai language and Grantha script. (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 668, recto pp. 76–77)

**Transliteration:**

**Left:** ยนนีลงหินบตขางน่าหง (This Yantra for the stone in front of the swan.)  
**Right:** ยนนีลงไขไนม่อกูน (This Yantra is put in the cauldron over the fireplace.)

Ceremonial instructions also appear in Thai language. The Thai instructions explain to priests how to perform rituals and ceremonies accompanying the utterance of Sanskrit prayers (Figure 15). These ceremonial instructions also contextualize the prayers, despite their brevity. In addition, use of the Thai language demonstrates that the priests who performed the rituals understood Thai rather than Sanskrit or Tamil.

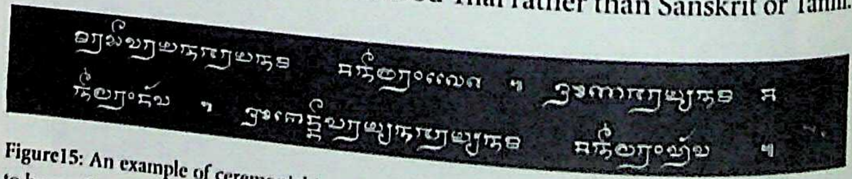


**Figure15:** An example of ceremonial instructions given after each mantra, marking the body parts to be purified while uttering each Sanskrit verse. (Bavarian State Library of Munich, Cod. Siam 99, recto p. 22)

**Transliteration:**

mādhivāyanarāyanam อนีลางแขน (This is for [reciting when] washing arms.) | omṇarāyyanam อนี ลางตัว (This is for washing the body.)| omkottapāyyanarāyyanam อนีลางหัว (This is for washing the head.)|

The scribal paratexts found in Siamese Grantha manuscripts appear mainly in Thai language, both in the Siamese Grantha script and the Thai script. Thai language is arguably most practical as paratexts are primarily provided by scribes to communicate with Siamese readers and users of the manuscripts. Furthermore, Sanskrit and Tamil have never been used by Brahmanical priests as communicative languages in everyday life. Like other Siamese manuscripts, the paratexts of the Siamese Grantha corpus indicate the manuscript's recto or verso starting points (through paratextual elements known as side-markers), give the title for each text (especially for various texts compiled in an anthology), and record the date of manuscript production (in case of scribal colophons). These scribal paratexts in Thai language target readers and users of Grantha manuscripts who were Thai speakers. They undeniably assist them in dealing with such unintelligible foreign texts as Sanskrit and Tamil. Genette (1991, 261) considers paratexts to be a threshold situated around texts; in this case, Thai vernacular language enfolds this multilingual corpus of texts written in "sacred" Grantha script. Note that both Thai and Grantha scripts are commonly used in paratexts. The exact reason for the choice of scripts in Thai paratexts is unclear.

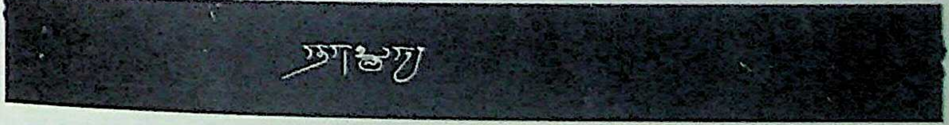


**Figure 16:** An example of side-markers denoting the beginning of the verso side of the manuscript: นาปลาย ('[This is] the verso page.'), written in Ordinary Siamese Grantha script. (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 667, verso p.2)

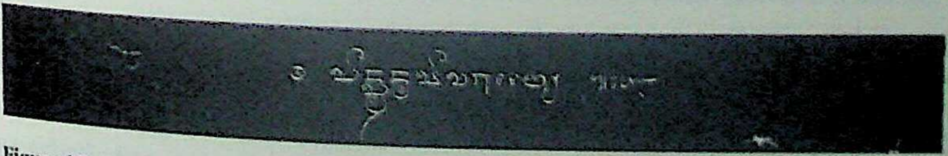


**Figure 17:** An example of paratextual elements providing the text title (in the middle of manuscript): ปิดปรฐูษิวาไลย ฯ (Closing the Gate of the Abode of Siwa), written in Decorative Siamese Grantha script. (National Library of Thailand, Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms, no. 668, verso p. 55)

Although the majority of the Siamese Grantha corpus comprises Sanskrit and Tamil texts, Thai language also has a significant function. As the main language in the society where this sub-manuscript culture is based, Thai was the language of paratexts within the Grantha manuscript culture of Siam. Furthermore, ritual texts composed in Thai verse and prose are incorporated with Sanskrit and Tamil prayers, lending a multilingual feature to this unique corpus.

## Concluding remarks

Siamese Grantha manuscript culture is a unique multilingual phenomenon among the manuscript cultures of the Thai-Tai world. Three languages from three different linguistic families — Sanskrit, Tamil, and Thai — play important roles. The corpus of Siamese Grantha manuscripts in this chapter is cultural confluence of three different textual traditions that awaits further exploration and investigation.

The Siamese Grantha script has long been perceived as a sacred script among Brahmanical priests. However, it is not the only sacred script in Siamese manuscript culture. Since the dawn of Siamese literacy at the turn of the 14th century, the Khòm script has been used as a sacred script in Siamese Buddhist culture for preserving the scriptures (Buddhist Canons) and talismanic texts (Santi and Nawarat 2018, 45). The Khòm script has long been part of Siamese traditional education. Khòm literacy was common among those with a monastic education until the early 20th century. On the other hand, the Siamese Grantha script was considered sacred in the Siamese Brahmanical context, as its use was restricted to the priests of Devasathan exclusively for ritual purposes and royal ceremonies.

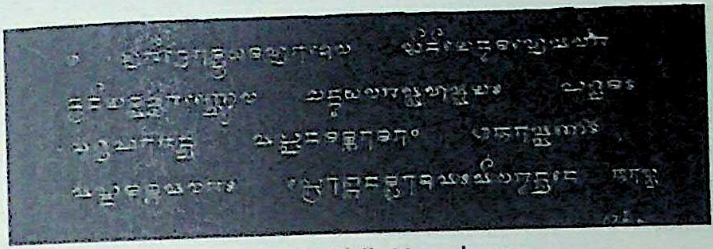
The adaptation of the Siamese Grantha script from South India in Siamese writing culture excludes common readers from engaging with the manuscript texts. Furthermore, only priests had access to ritual and liturgical texts written in Sanskrit and Tamil, which were not spoken by Theravada Buddhist monks and the general populace. The incorporation of these two languages in texts for court and royal ceremonies renders them sacred languages of both kings and gods. The uniqueness of script and languages creates a mystical sanctuary for Siamese Brahmanical priests. This sanctity places Siamese Brahmanical priests at the same level as Theravada Buddhist monks, who prevailed in the predominately Buddhist Thai community, and contributes to the social hierarchy that incorporated Brahmanical priests and lay people.

There are less than 20 accessible manuscripts; the Siamese Grantha corpus was a mystery to modern researchers and students for a long time. This preliminary study is another call for serious investigation of this unique manuscript corpus, which demonstrates the dynamics of Sanskrit and Tamil texts in the context of Siamese manuscript culture and from a wider Southeast Asian perspective. The Sanskrit and Tamil texts in the Siamese Grantha corpus have developed forms and functions different from those in South India and have been adapted to Siamese ears to the extent that they are considered "corrupted" and "broken." These dynamics cannot be simply dismissed by modern scholars because of the deviated and broken grammar of the texts. They should be taken to represent the instrinsic nature of Sanskrit and Tamil texts transmitted to traditional manuscript cultures outside India.

Siamese Grantha manuscripts are still terra incognita for researchers from various academic fields. When were these manuscripts produced or compiled? Where were they used and circulated? And what are the rationales behind selection of the texts? For scholars of Sanskrit, this corpus provides an additional source of manuscripts from mainland Southeast Asia, where Sanskrit epigraphy has been extensively identified and seriously researched. Although Tamil scholarship in Thailand is underdeveloped, the corpus represents a remnant of Tamil textual culture that found its way from Tamil Nadu across the sea to Thailand centuries ago. For Thai scholars, this multilingual corpus fosters better understanding of Sanskrit-Tamil culture in Thailand and provides broader and deeper insights into the entire Siamese manuscript culture, in which Siamese Grantha literacy has been a significant subculture for centuries.

# Appendix

## Incomplete reconstructed Sanskrit text of *Śivadvādaśanāmastotra* (Ms. no. 668)[20]

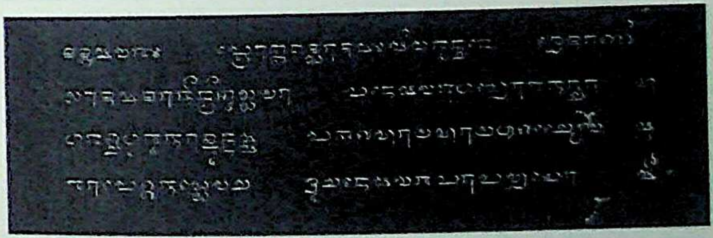


Line 1. ◎ harioṃpraṭhamahādeva | dhvitiyemaheṣvara
*hariḥ oṃ prathamas mahādevo dvitiyas maheśvaraḥ*

2. tratiyamṣaṅkharaṇcaiva | catuṭhavāṣṣabhaṣṣayam | pancamam
*tṛtiyaḥ śaṅkaraś caiva caturtho vṛṣamadhvajaḥ pañcamaḥ*

3. ṣunlapānatca | ṣappatamamkāmāṅ | ganāṣṣaṇam
*śūlapāṇiś ca saptamaḥ kāmāṅganāśanaḥ*

4. ṣaptamamīṣavaram | prokkatatamdhvādaṣamṣivarutcate | nāvva
*saptamas īśvaraḥ prokto - - - dvādvaśaḥ śiva ucyate navamaś*

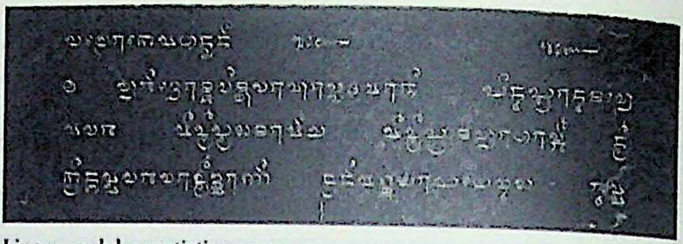


Line 1. mamiṣavaram | prokkatamdhvādaṣamṣivarutcate | edāṇi
*iśvaraḥ prokto dvādaśaḥ śiva ucyate. etāni*

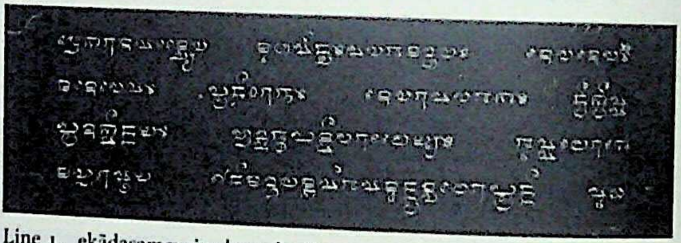
2. dhādaṣamānitrikudhdhayā | pateṣavaragabhoranactā | bha
*dvādaśanāmāni trikṛtvo yaḥ paṭhen naraḥ. - - -*

3. garancagurunāmruttaṣṣa | pakībhālabhālagancyeva | ṣu
*- - - gurūṇām uta talpagaḥ - - - caiva su*

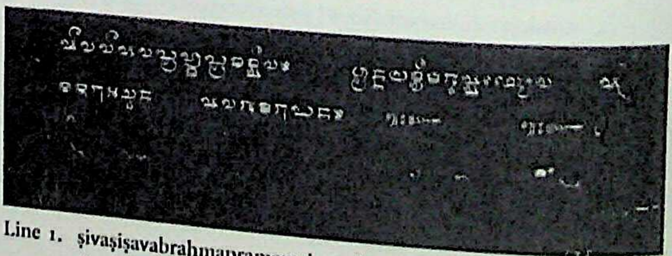
4. rāpennanaddhevaca | ucteṣavarapāpahayo | ṣi
*rāpāyi tathaiva ca mucyate sarvapāpebhyaḥ śi*



Line 1. **valokeșagatjati ๛ ๛**
*valokaṃ sa gacchati.*
2. **∘ hariomtavimbhavābhāvvarṣāni | pituprātumahe**
*hariḥ oṃ - - - varṣāṇi prītaḥ pātu mahe*
3. **ṣavara | ṣipripradhamāṣiva | ṣipribraḥmahāgāvrī | tri**
*śvaraḥ - - - prathamā śiva - - - mahāgaurī*
4. **kritīṣṣavaravāariṅṅṣāṇi | tratiṣanḍayāpayevudha | ruṣṣa**
*trisaṃdhyaṃ yaḥ paṭhed budhaḥ rudra*



Line 1. **ekādaṣamcyaiva | mughaṣitcamṣavaramṅgalam | devadevam**
*ekādaśaś caiva mokṣadaṃ sarvamaṅgalam devadevaṃ*
2. **madevaṣam | pratithānam | devāṣavarakam | trikriṣṣa**
*mahādeveśaṃ pratiṣṭhānaṃ devaṃ sarvagam triḥ kriyāt*
3. **pradakṣittayam | haṅṣarūpamṣivālaiyyam | ruṣṣalauke**
*pradakṣiṇaṃ yo haṃṣarūpaṃ śivālayam rudraloke*
4. **mahāṣūya | ītimaṅgalamkaṣiraṣamuttramvalaupratti | ṣudha**
*mahāsūryaḥ iti maṅgalam kṣīrasamudram - - - śuddhaṃ*



Line 1. **ṣivaṣiṣavabrahmapramamṣivam | grattalamvivaruṣṣacaiyva | ṣa**
*śivaṃ śivaṃ brahma paramaṃ śivam śakalaṃ viśvaṃ caiva*
2. **madārvuta | ṣavaramāpatam ๛ ๛**
*- - - sarvaṃ samāptam.*

**Translation**[21]

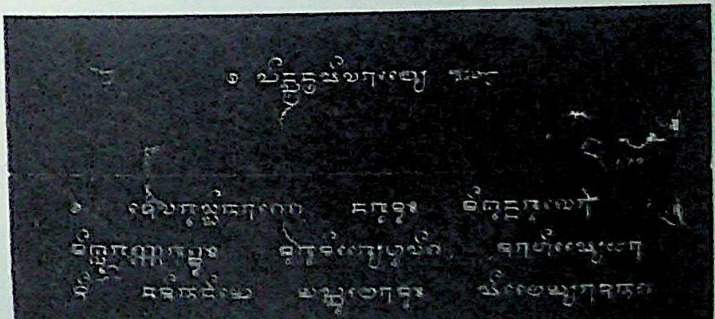
Hari oṃ, the first one is "the great god," the second one is "the great lord," the third one is "the creator of blessings," the fourth one is "the one who has the bull as a banner," the fifth one is "the one who has a trident in his hands," the seventh [sixth] one is "the destroyer of the god of love's body," the seventh one is "the lord," - - - these twelve names refer to Śiva.

The ninth one is "the lord," these twelve names refer to Śiva.

If a man should recite these twelve names three times - - - or the one who has sexual intercourse [with the wives] of his teachers - - - and the one who is fond of drinking liquor, in this very manner, that man becomes free of sins and goes to the abode of Śiva.

Hari oṃ, the great lord who is pleased for - - - years, let him protect. - - - The first one is Śiva, the husband of Gaurī. - - - If a wise man should recite three times these eleven [names] of the auspicious one [and] circumambulate three times the giver of liberation, the auspicious among all things, the god of gods, the lord of gods, the foundation, the god, the all-pervading one, and the abode of Śiva in the form of a swan, [that man becomes] the great sun in the abode of the auspicious one. This is the benediction. Śiva is the one in the pure - - - milky ocean; Śiva is the supreme Brahman; Śiva is the whole universe; - - - This is all completed.

## Incomplete reconstruction of the invocatory verses and some verses of *Tiruvāymoḻi in Pit Pratu Sivalai* (Ms. no. 668)



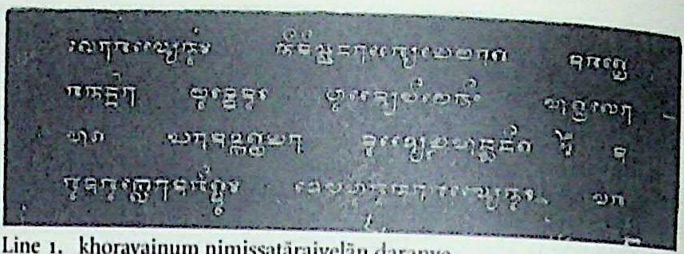
Line 1. ๏ pitpratūṣivālai ๚ะ๛ [Thai: ๏ ปิดประตูศิวาไลย ๚ะ๛]

Line 1. ๏ ḍevarudhdhināṇe tarudum mikuttarukho
*devaḻuti nā - ṭeṉṟum - ku - rukūr*

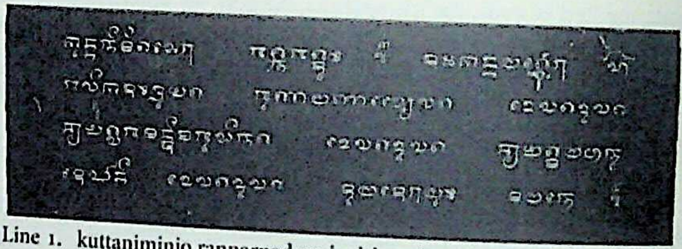
2. mikkhuraṇṇarandum murumiraiguvin dāṭiṣaiṭhā
*- - - reṉṟum maru - - - vaṇ - - - antā*

3. di adinatiye yapbulodun ṣilaiyādanan
*ti aṭiyiṇaiyē eppoḻutum cintiyāy neñ*

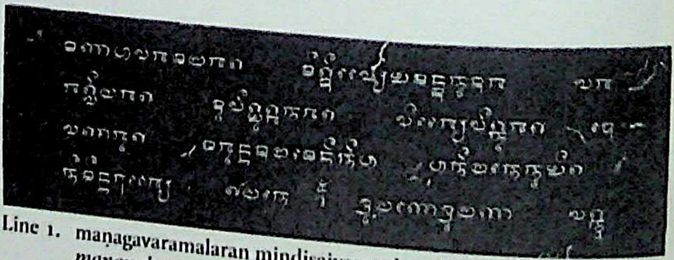
4. yedalandum | 1 ranattālumvāyālum vanruṇakhuru
*cē teḻintu | 1 maṉattālum vāyālum vaṇ - - - kuru*



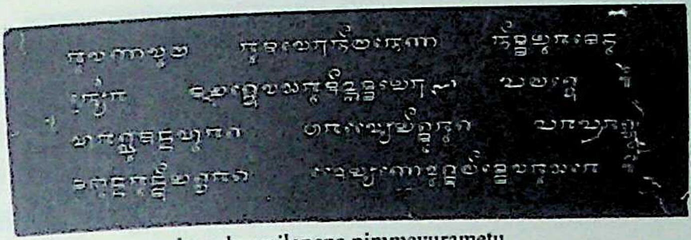
Line 1. khoravainum nimiṣṣatāraiyelān daranye
*kūr - pēṇum - - - tāraiyallātiṟaiñcēṉ*
2. ranattā lummedum gudaivileniṃ bhanlakho
*taṉattalum ētum kuṟaivilēṉ - - - kō*
3. bhan pādaṅkanlayā muḍaiyabhatdhatin |2 da
*paṇ pātaṅkaḷ - yāmuṭaiya - - - |2 -*
4. rudarukkhodatinḍum ḍevagurunāravainum vara
*- - - devaguruṇām - - - vara*



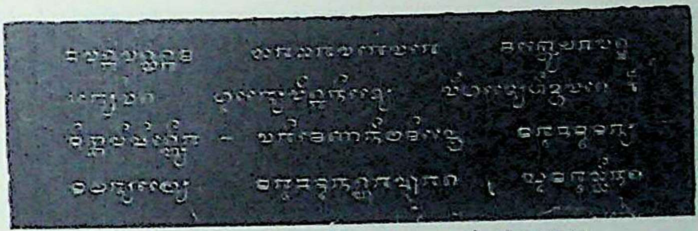
Line 1. kuttaniminjo rannarnadum |3 dṛkattalano bha
- - - |3 - - -
2. ravikadam uyan ruṇalaṇaḍaivan ṅevanṅuvan
*- - - uyar nalam uḷaiyavaṉ evaṉ avaṉ*
3. āyanvaramatdimarudhinan ṅevanṅuvan āyandalaganu
*mayarvū aṟa mati aruḷiṉaṉ evaṉ avaṉ ayar - - -*
4. depati ṅevanṅuvan duladolum malane |4
*atipati evaṉ avaṉ - - - maṉaṉē |4*



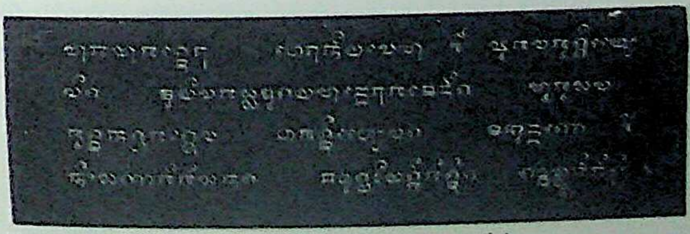
Line 1. maṇagavaramalaran mindiṣaiyamatdanudara vara
*maṉaṉakavaramalam aṟa - - - eḷutarum vara*
2. ranvilaran muvinyunranaran varaivinnuran ḍe
- - -
3. vaṇarun maruttadalametiniga ganilanenuyin
*uṉar - muḻu nalam - etir nikaḷ ka - ḻiviṉum*
4. numittārai īlane |5 ulaṇe ulaṇa vannu
*- mikunarai ilanē |5 uḷaṉ eṉil uḷaṉ avaṉ*



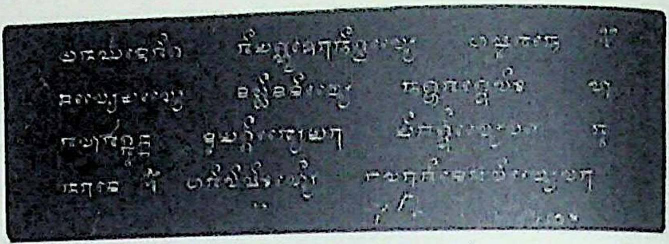
Line 1. ruvaṇavula rudavonilaneṇa nimmayurametu
*- - - uru - - ilaṉ eṉa - - - u*
2. naira mayanḍevadharumiṅkammayo balanḍe |6
*ḷaṉ iru - - - deva - - - parantē* |6
3. baranṣudattabhuran garavaiyindurun barabaranbhu
*paranta taṉ - para - - - vaiyuḷ toṟum para - tu*
4. makuttarutdiyanvaran ṅaiṇeṅundalimmevarudhare |7
*ḷaṉ karantu - - - tuḷaṉ ivai uṇṭa karaṉē* |7



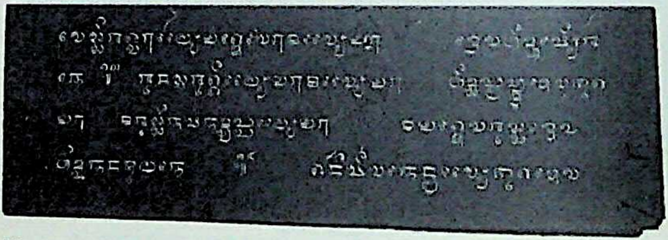
Line 1. avanravandhanran dharadharavarevare akgaiya avanṛ
*avaravar tamatama - - - vakai - avar*
2. raivan guraivinraniḍai vigaḍaigiṅgavane |8
*avar vitivaḷi aṭaiya - - - niṉṟaṉarē* |8
3. dikkāviṣinbhaira varimeṇanilamichai maru adumanya
*tiṭa vicumpu eri vaḷi - - - nilaṃ ivaimi - - -*
4. malanyalai maru adunanbharabharan bumarudhdhinan
- - -



Line 1. bharavharando gonilavebha |9 ṣuravarunnilai
*- - - |9 curar aru nilai*
2. vin mulivaradhdhaḍunlabhattoramenin bhurudhava
*viṉ mutal - - - vatum - - - a*
3. rundanangaranḍeva garandigaivan makuttaṇe |10
*raṉ - - - maittu uḷanē* |10
4. nirṇdhaṇariridhanan aḍunlathilanririndin iṅmadhdhuririnni
*niṉṟaṉar iruntaṉar tirinta - ṉar niṉṟilar - - -*



Line 1. lanaghraderin riyanbhūḍoninlavai gaṣurane |11
*- - - ivai karaṉē* |11
2. avaiyavai midhdhimamilai nangaranḍevim bha
- - -
3. rabharanrutta muyanniraiyā yiranḍivaivan ru
*- - - niṟai āyirattu ivai pattum*
4. nāme |12 gariviṣimbhai ravārimeravilaivā
*vītē* |12 *kara vicumpu eri vali - - -*



Line 1. vedhdhiranvālaiyanḍevomavaiyā evagiṅgaṣaira
- - -
2. te |13 ru adharunnilaiyāmavaiyā giṅdhabrahmmaḍevakun
- |13 - - -
3. yā marudhdhinaṣanamhappalaiyā mayanḍevarudhdha eva
*- - - ayaṉ eṉa ulaku - - -*
4. giṅṣanatadulane |14
*- - - uḷanē* |14

### The standard version of the *Tiruvāymoḻi* verses and the invocatory verses in the order in which they appear in the manuscript[22]

Tiruvaḻuti nāṭeṉṟum Teṉkurukūreṉṟum
Maruviṉiya vaṇporunaleṉrum – arumaṟaikaḷ
Antāti ceytāṉaṭiyiṇaiyē eppoḻutum
Cintiyāy neñcē teḷintu.
(Invocatory verse attributed to Īśvaramuni, c. 10th/11th centuries)

Maṉattālum vāyālum vaṇkurukūr pēṇum
Iṉattāraiyallātiṟaiñcēṉ – taṉattālum
Ētum kuṟaivilēṉ – Entai Caṭakōpaṉ
Pātaṅkaḷ yāmuṭaiya paṟṟu.
(Invocatory verse attributed to Coṭṭainampi, c. 11th century)

The third invocatory verse is incomplete.

Uyarvu aṟa uyar nalam Uṭaiyavaṉ evaṉ? avaṉ,
Mayarvū aṟa mati-nalam aruḷiṉan evaṉ? avaṉ,
Ayarvu aṟum amararkaḷ atipati evaṉ? avaṉ
Tuyar aṟu cuṭar-aṭi toḻutu eḻu eṉ maṉaṉē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.1)

Maṉaṉ-akam malam aṟa malarmicai eḻutarum
Maṉaṉ-uṇarvu aḷavu ilaṉ, poṟi-uṇarvuavai ilaṉ,
Iṇaṉ uṇar, muḻu nalam, etir nikaḻ kaḻiviṉum
Iṇaṉ ilaṉ, eṉaṉ uyir, mikunarai ilanē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.2)

Uḷaṉ eṉil uḷaṉ, avaṉ uruvam iv uruvukaḷ;
Uḷaṉ alaṉ eṉil, avaṉ aruvam iv varuvukaḷ;
Uḷaṉ eṉa, ilaṉ eṉa, ivai kuṇam uṭaimaiyil,
Uḷaṉ iru takaimaiyoṭu, oḷivu ilaṉ parantē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.9)

Paranta taṇ paravaiyuḷ nīrtoṟuṃ parantuḷaṉ
Paranta aṇṭam itu eṉa: nilam vicumpu oḻivu aṟak
Karanta cil iṭantoṟum iṭam tikaḻ porultoṟum
Karantu, eṅkum parantuḷaṉ; ivai uṇṭa karaṉē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.10)

Avaravar tamatamatu aṟivu aṟi vakaivakai
Avaravar iṟaiyavar eṉa aṭi aṭaivarkaḷ;
Avaravar iṟaiyavar kuṟaivu ilar; Iṟaiyavar
Avaravar vitivaḻi aṭaiya niṉṟaṉarē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.5)

Tiṭa vicumpu, eri, vaḷi nīr, nilam ivaimicaip,
Paṭar poruḷ muḻuvatum āy, avai avaitoṟum
Uṭal micai uyir eṉak karantu, eṅkum parantuḷaṉ:
Cuṭar miku curutiyuḷ ivai uṇṭa curaṉē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.7)

Curar aṟivu-aru nilai viṇ mutal muḻuvatum
Varaṉ mutalāy, avai muḻutu uṇṭa paraparaṉ
Puram oru mūṉṟu erittu, amararkkum aṟiviyantu,
Araṉ ayaṉ eṉa, ulaku aḻittu amaittu uḷanē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.8)

Niṉṟaṉar iruntaṉar kiṭantaṉar tirintaṉar,
Niṉṟilar iruntilar kiṭantilar tirintilar,
Eṉṟum ōr iyalviṉar eṉa niṉaivu ariyavar;
Eṉṟum ōr iyalvoṭu niṉṟa em tiṭarē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.6)

Kara vicumpu, eri, vaḷi, nīr, nilam ivaimicai
Varaṉ-navil, tiṟal, vali, aḷi, poṟai, āyṉiṉṟa
Paraṉ aṭimēl kurukūre caṭakōpaṉ col
Niral-niṟai āyirattu ivai pattum vīṭē. (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.11)

**Translation**[23]

O mind, be clear and always think
of the feet of the one
who wove the precious Veda
into the endless Tamiḻ antāti,
lauding the auspicious Vaḻuti lands,
and Tirukkurukūr touched by the lovely Porunal.

I will not bow before anyone
who does not in thought and word
cherish splendid Kurukūr.
Wealth is nothing
The feet of my father Śaṭhakōpaṉ
are my refuge.

The third invocatory verse is incomplete.
Who possesses the highest good?
Him.
Who cuts delusion grants a good clear mind?
Him.
Who's the master of unforgetting untiring immortals?
Sunder grief, worship his luminous feet, bow down, rise up
my mind.

A mind severed from filth
blooms and rises
He's beyond even its knowing beyond
what the senses feel
He's complete bliss wholly good
He's the future present past
This peerless one
is my precious life.

If you say he is,
all these forms are his
If you say he isn't,
all these non-forms are his
If you say he is and he isn't
then he exists as both
without limit
pervading everything.

He's in the cool vast water,
in every drop, he's everywhere
in the wide world, in the earth in the sky,
limitless, he's hidden
in the smallest things,
luminous in every place
he pervades all,
the one who ate it all.

Each knows what they know,
each finds a different path
Each has their god
each reaches his feet
Each of these gods lacks nothing,
everyone is fated
to find their way to the great lord
who's always there.

As sky fire wind water earth
spread out
he was everything entire,
within each in all things,
he is as breath in the body,

hidden and pervasive
He's in the luminous śruti,
this god who's eaten everything.

He's beyond the ken of the gods,
beginning with sky
he's everything, the creator's creator,
the great one who ate it all
He burned the three cities,
gifted wisdom to the gods,
as both Araṉ and Ayaṉ
he unmakes and remakes worlds.

He stands he sits he reclines
he wanders
He doesn't stand or sit
he doesn't recline he doesn't wander
You can't know him
as just one thing
He's always there,
constant firm.

On the highest one
who abides
as sky fire wind water earth,
who is
sound vigour strength love serenity,
Kurukūr's Śaṭhakōpāṉ composed
these ten verses from his perfect thousand.
They are your release.

## Endnote: Sacred Literacy

1. Though the earliest evidence of Thai literacy has been found in the inscriptions dated from the late 13th century, the earliest extant Siamese manuscripts are dated from the 17th century.

2. Pancanadishvara Subrahmanya Shastri (ปัญจนทีศวร สุพรหมัณย ศาสตรี, commonly known as ป. ศาสตรี; 1899–1952) was born in Tamil Nadu in 1899 in the Brahmin caste (hence his title of Shastri). He graduated in English, Sanskrit, and Ancient Indian History from the University of Madras in 1921. In 1925, he was employed by the Wachirayan State Library as a Sanskrit specialist and translator. This work brought him to Thailand (Oraphin Limsakun 2014, 29–31). He has published many original works in Thai, as well as translations of Sanskrit texts. Shastri's background differs from other Brahmanical priests in Thailand, as he was not a native Thai, but born a Brahmin in South India with a subsequent modern education in Sanskrit and ancient history.

3. Note that this chapter intentionally avoids the use of the words "Hindu" or "Brahmanism." For examples of usage, see Wales 1931, 19. These terms reflect both the belief systems in South Asia, especially India, and the more remote and dynamic belief systems in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the term "Brahmanical culture" suggests a stronger connection with Brahmins and Brahmanical priests, who determine the main features of the culture through their beliefs and practices. This chapter also differentiates between "Brahmins," which refers to the groups of people in a hierarchical social system based on births and education in India, and "Brahmanical priests," indicating individuals with Brahmin heritage who function within the ritual and courtly context of Siam.

4. According to the current official website of the Brahmanical Temple in Bangkok, there are 16 priests on active duty. Of these, 6, including the Supreme Brahmanical Priest, hold honorific titles, while the other 10 common priests are called Phram Phithi (literally 'priest of the ceremony') (Thewasathan 2010).

5. The Giant Swing (เสาชิงช้า) is a pair of red-painted teak columns (approximately 21 meters high) topped with a cross. It now faces the city hall of Bangkok and has become a symbol of the city and a monument to Brahmanical culture in Thailand. Established during the reign of King Rama I (probably in 1784), the Giant Swing was used during a royal ceremony called *Trīyampāvāy* (Siripoj 2007, 47). This ceremony was held during the seventh and ninth waxing days of the second month as part of the New Year festival, according to the Brahmanical tradition. It represents the moment of the year in which the God Śiva visits the human world. The swing represents the deities welcoming Śiva to the world. During the ceremony, the Brahmanical priests ride the Giant Swing in a reception for the god (Chulalongkorn 2009, 58). In addition to the swing, this festival consists of elaborate processions and other related rituals. It is perceived as exotic and attracts wide audiences, ranging from Siamese royalty and noblemen to commoners and foreign tourists. Note that there is also another Giant Swing at the Temple in Nakhòn Si Thammarat, though much smaller in size.

6. The Thai word *chiang* (literally 'italic, deviating') refers to "irregular, deviating" types of scripts. This applies to several scripts other than *chiang phram* and *chiang khrün*, such as *chiang Khòm* (irregular Khòm) and *chiang Lao* (irregular Lao) (Phimphan 2013, 47).

7. The alphabetic chart for Decorative Grantha published in Marr (1969) comes from the last verso page of Ms. no. 613 (Royal Ceremonial Treatises Subsection, Ms. no. 613, verso p. 58). The main text of this manuscript, consisting of various mantras in Sanskrit, is written in Thai script. The alphabetic chart of Decorative Grantha provided at the end of this manuscript suggests that the text might have originally appeared in Decorative Grantha and been transliterated into Thai.

8. For more information on Sanskrit stotra literature, see Hamsa Stainton's *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir* (2019, Chapter 2).

9. Note that the five products derived from cows are now substituted with water, according to P. Subrahmanya Shastri 1931, 26.

10. *Pratchaya Bucha* or *Prājya Pūjā* is a worship of the stars found in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* of *Yajurveda*. See P. Subrahmanya Shastri 1931, 28.

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*เวทบูชาเทวรูปต่างๆ*

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*ตำราบวชพราหมณ์*

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*ตำราบวชพราหมณ์*

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*ตำราอักษรต่างๆ*

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*คาถาหัวใจต่างๆ*

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*ตำราอักษรต่างๆ*

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**d) Interview**

Chawin Rangsiphrammanakul (ชวิน รังสิพราหมณกุล), the Supreme Court Brahmanical Priest). Interviewed by Peera Panarut at the Devasathan-the Brahmanical Temple, Bangkok, 5 September 2015.

# PART 2

# BUDDHIST AND CLASSICAL LITERATURE

# *Anisong* Manuscripts in *Bun Phawet* Festivals in Laos: The Relationship Between Manuscripts and Sermons

## SILPSUPA JAENGSAWANG

*Anisong* sermons describe meritorious rewards for attending annual *Bun Phawet* chanting festivals (*thet mahachat*) and are performed during rituals. The religious content of *Anisong* sermons differs from *Bun Phawet* chanting itself: *Bun Phawet* chanting recites the story of Prince Vessantara (*phra wetsandòn*), while *Anisong* sermons explain meritorious incentives to listen to or join ritual chanting. As the texts of *Anisong* sermons are not long, listening to them takes less time than to *Bun Phawet* chanting. The corpus for this chapter comprises 10 manuscripts, containing texts of *Anisong*, or meritorious rewards gained from attending *Bun Phawet* chantings. Six of the manuscripts are kept in Luang Prabang, two in Luang Namtha, and two in Paris.

The study of *Anisong* manuscripts focuses on such paratexts as colophons, on the production process, and on the usage and storage of manuscripts to explore the relationships between *Anisong* manuscripts and sermons in *Bun Phawet* chanting festivals. Textual analysis is also applied to trace these relationships. Different texts were written in different styles, which reveal cultural perspectives. Manuscript analysis, ritual analysis, and textual analysis are applied concurrently to study the relationships between *Anisong* manuscripts and sermons. The objective is to answer the following questions: In addition to the importance of the writing support, what other physical features of the manuscript make

*Anisong* sermons important in *Bun Phawet* chanting festivals? To what extent are wishes expressed in colophons relevant to *Bun Phawet* chanting festivals and to *Anisong* sermons? Why are different writing supports used for *Anisong* manuscripts and what different materials are used? In terms of textual analysis, what kinds of texts are associated with *Anisong* sermons in the *Bun Phawet* festival?

## Introduction

The traditional chanting festival *Thet Mahasat* (Thai: *thet mahachat*) or *Bun Phawet* is based on the Buddhist belief in the coming Buddha Metteyya. It has been adopted in Laos and Thailand, where Theravāda Buddhism plays a significant role. According to the well-known story of *Phra Malai*,[1] a venerable monk obtained the miraculous ability to travel through Heaven and Hell. The Bodhisatta Metteyya is destined to reincarnate as the next Buddha after the 5,000-year Buddha Gotama period, of which less than 2,500 years remain. The Bodhisatta commanded *Phra Malai* to promulgate statements about meritorious commitments to all human beings. These state that everybody can reincarnate after the coming of Buddha Metteyya, provided that he or she follows the Buddhist morality precepts, accumulates merit, makes donations (gift-giving), and listens to the story of *Vessantara Jātaka* (Lao: *phawet*). This story comprises 13 episodes and is recited in the annual *Thet Mahachat* chanting festival. *Vessantara Jātaka* was the great previous life of the Bodhisatta (before his reincarnation as Siddhattha Gotama), known as the "Great Birth." According to Buddhist belief, the Lord Buddha had to perfect himself with the Ten Virtues or Perfections (Pāli: *pārami*) before he could attain Buddhahood. This could not be achieved in a single lifetime, but through the 10 stages of virtuous life depicted in the Buddha's last 10 existences (Malalasekera 2002, 419). The belief of Buddha Metteyya conveyed by *Phra Malai* and the great virtues of Prince

Wetsandòn mean that listening to *Vessantara Jātaka* is a way to gain substantial merit. All 13 episodes of Buddha Gotama's previous life are chanted at this annual festival.

In addition to the 13 *Mahachat* episodes customarily chanted, *Anisong* or *Salòng* sermons (*Anisong khao phan kòn* and *Anisong wetsantara*)[2] are delivered during the festival itself. The *Anisong khao phan kòn* sermon declares meritorious rewards for offering rice to Buddha Gotama. The sermon usually follows a procession of 1,000 rice balls by the festival participants. *Anisong wetsantara* sermons reveal meritorious incentives to listen to *Vessantara Jātaka*; they are given after the 13-episode chanting:

> In both the *Bun Phawet* and the *Tang Tham Luang*, as the ceremony is known in northern Thailand, the recital of *Vessantara Jātaka* in the vernacular is traditionally followed (or sometimes preceded) by a text known as *Anisong phra wetsandorn*, or "The Vessantara Reward," meaning the benefit one receives for the merit-making act of listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*. This text is also held as having been originally preached by the Buddha after finishing relating *Vessantara Jātaka*. In more detail than the *Phra Malai* story, *Anisong phra wetsandorn* tells of the future riches and good fortune that await those who have listened to and made merit (by giving offerings) for the recitations of each of the 13 chapters (*kan*) of *Vessantara Jātaka*. The rewards for having paid respect (*bucha*) to each section of the story closely follow the event related in each chapter. They are often the same rewards that Vessantara himself received for his actions in that particular chapter of the story. (Jory 2016, 34–35)

A retrospective glance at manuscript cultures reveals that texts were inscribed on several kinds of writing support. In Laos, palm-leaf manuscripts (Lao: *nangsü bailan*) and mulberry-paper manuscripts (Lao: *phapsa*) support a range of texts: treatises, astrology, the Buddhist canon (Tipiṭaka), *Anisong*, etc. *Anisong* or *salòng* texts were written on various kinds of manuscripts to suit diverse purposes, such as making dedications to a monastery, preaching sermons for various occasions, and beseeching the Buddhist religion to last until the end of its 5,000 year term.[3] Manuscript producers aimed to gain merit from copying and offering books to temples; the merit could also be dedicated to the deceased. The ultimate purpose of *Anisong* manuscripts, however, is to be read by monks as sermons or chanted at religious occasions, so the manuscripts are relevant to all *Anisong* or *salòng* preaching events.

The 10 *Anisong* manuscripts listed below are arranged by year of production and derived from several repositories. They are analyzed by titles, scripts, and colophons; all are related to the annual *Bun Phawet* festivals in Laos.

| Title | Writing support | Production date | Repository | Sponsor | Scribe |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Salòng wetsantara* | Palm leaf | November 1817 | Wat Mai Suwanna Phumaram, Luang Prabang | Cao Pathumma Ratchathida (high-ranked laywoman) and followers | Unknown |
| *Anisong wetsantara* | | November 1826 | Khòn Kham village, Nalae town, Luang Namtha | Khuna (monk) | |
| *Salòng khao phan kòn* | | September 1913 | The National Museum, Luang Prabang | Bunthan (laywoman) | Unknown |
| *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok* | | September 1944 | Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang | Virachitto (Khamchan) (venerable monk) | |
| *Salòng khao phan kòn* | | 1990 | | Cinna Thammo (monk) | Virachitto (Khamchan) (venerable monk) |
| *Salòng maha wetsantara chadok* | Mulberry paper | February 2004 | | Unknown | Thit Niao (former monk) |
| *Anisong maha wetsantara* | | Unknown | | | Unknown |
| *Anisong wetsantara* | | | Müang Sing, Luang Namtha | | |
| *Anisong wetsantara* | | | The National Library of France, Paris | | |
| *Salòng khao phan kòn* | Palm leaf | | Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang | | |

The listed manuscripts contain *Anisong* texts used for sermons in annual *Bun Phawet* chanting festivals. Studies of manuscript cultures reveal that their role in *Anisong* preaching and their textual content make the 10 *Anisong* manuscripts valuable sources that reveal a significant relationship between manuscripts and festivals, including preaching rituals.

## *Anisong* manuscript production and the *Bun Phawet* festival in Laos

The table above shows that *Anisong* manuscript production finished within five months prior to the *Bun Phawet* festival period. Festivals were frequently held between the beginning of the year and the middle of March.[4] Veidlinger describes general scribal works as a seasonal activity: "The dates found in manuscript colophons demonstrate that the work was carried out mostly during the rainy season. The vast majority of dated manuscripts were completed in months nine, ten, eleven and twelve." (Veidlinger 2007, 123) The main purpose of copying a manuscript for a monastery by sponsors was for it to be read at *Bun Phawet* festivals. However, some sponsors may have produced manuscripts to pay homage to the previous life of the present Buddha Gotama in response to the upcoming festival; others to gain a better rebirth in the period of Buddha Metteyya. Even if the manuscripts are not used in festivals, in the context of Theravāda Buddhist beliefs, the merit gained by copying manuscripts exists; it ensures sponsors and writers beneficial returns or better anticipant lives; and the merits can be transmitted to the deceased. This belief is manifest in the colophons of the manuscripts.

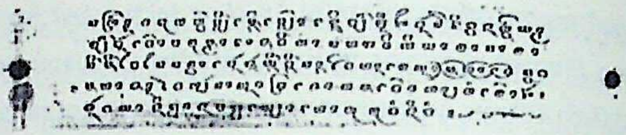


**Figure 1:** *Salòng wetsantara*; code: 06011406014-08, folio 10 (recto). Wat Mai Suwanna Phumaram, Luang Prabang, 1817.

**Transliteration:**
จุลศักราช ๑๑๗๙ ตัว ปีเมิงเป้า เดือนเจียง ขึ้น ๕ วัน ๗ รจนาแล้วยามเที่ยงวัน เจ้าปทุมมาราชธิดา สหกับ ทาสาทาสี มีใจใสศรัทธาเป็นอันยิ่ง จึงสร้างโวหารเทศนาสองมหาชาติไว้กับศาสนาพระโคตมะเจ้า ตราบต่อเท่า ๕ พันพรรษา นิพฺพาน ปจฺจโย โหตุ ทุวํ นิจฺจํ

**Translation:**
In CS 1179, a *müang pao* year, the fifth waxing day of the first lunar month, the seventh day of the week,[5] [the manuscript has been] completed at noon [by] the royal princess Cao Pathumma Ratchathida [and her] male and female followers who had the highest religious faith thereby producing the didactic *Sòng mahachat* for the Teachings of the Buddha Gotama to last until the end of 5,000 years. *Nibbāna paccayo hotu duvaṃ niccaṃ* (May this be a condition [for me] to reach *Nibbāna*).

The following colophon clearly shows the sponsor's declaration. The intention of Ms. Bunthan in sponsoring the manuscript commission was to dedicate the merit to all relevant beings (Lao: *phò kao mae lang phò kam mae wen*),[6] to recover from illness, and to attain ultimate peace (Pāli: *nibbāna*).

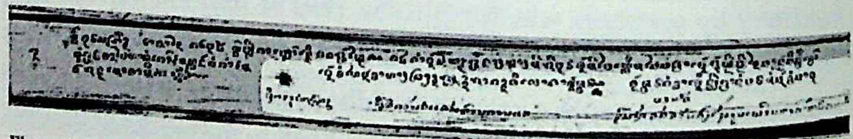


**Figure 2:** *Salòng khao phan kòn*, code: 06018506007-06, folio 4 (verso). The National Museum, Luang Prabang, 1913.

**Transliteration:**
จุลศักราช ๑๒๗๕ ตัว ปีกาเป้า เดือน ๑๑ ออกใหม่ ๑๕ ค่ำ วัน ๓ ยามกองงาย หมายมีอี่บุนทัน มีใจเลื่อมใสศรัทธา เป็นอันยิ่ง จึงได้สร้างหนังสือสองข้าวพันก้อนทานไปหาพ่อเก่าแม่หลัง พ่อกรรมแม่เวร ขอให้ผู้ข้าหายพยาธิอุบาทว์ อาฆาตทีโรคาทั้งมวล ขอข้าถึงนิพฺพานํ ปรมํ สุขํ สาธุ สาธุ อนุโมทามิ

**Translation:**
[The manuscript was completed in] CS 1275, a *ka pao* year, on the fifteenth waxing day of the eleventh lunar month, the third day of the week,[7] at the time of the morning drum (*kòng ngai*). [I], Ms. Bunthan, am so faithful in Buddhism thereby producing the *Sòng khao phan kòn* manuscript in order to dedicate the merit to all persons to whom I was relevant in previous lives. May I recover from any kinds of illness [and finally] reach *Nibbāna*. (Pāli ending expression.)

The expression of the underlined transliteration below literally means: "Rough hands do not touch female breasts. [The text] is completed here. [I] will erase the inscribed traces of a stylus at the below corner, my friends. [I] can merely do this." It is written in the Lao Buhan script next to the colophon. The first sentence mentions somebody who may not touch female breasts due to his rough hands. It is clearly by a different writer and is irrelevant to the *Salòng khao phan kòn* text. The manuscript was sponsored by a laywoman, but the scribe is unknown. The vague information makes it difficult to conjecture about the writer. However, the sentence can be basically interpreted as prohibiting the touching of female bodies, which is directly related to monkhood: monks are not allowed to physically touch females. "Rough hands" can be understood as the "hands (of monks) being prohibited from touching females," or "touching females with regret due to disciplinary rules." Needless to say, the scribe was likely a monk.

**Transliteration:**

มือกระด้างบ่กุมนมสาว สิทธิการก็แล้วเท่านี้ก่อนแล สิม้างเหล็กจารใส่มุม
บ่อนใต้เพื่อนหากเท่านี้จะทำได้

**Translation:**

Rough hands do not touch female breasts. [The text] is completed here. [I] will erase the inscribed traces of a stylus at the below corner, my friends. [I] can merely do this.

The following colophon is an excerpt from an *Anisong* manuscript inscribed and sponsored by the venerable monk, Virachitto (Khamchan) of Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang. In order to celebrate his 24th birthday, he wrote five texts[8] in one fascicle, including *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok*, as a multiple-text manuscript (MTM).[9] The complete statement of intent, combined with the place and the date of production, was written on the title page. The five texts were based on a template of covers and paginations throughout the manuscript. However, the table of contents was written only on the cover of the first text.

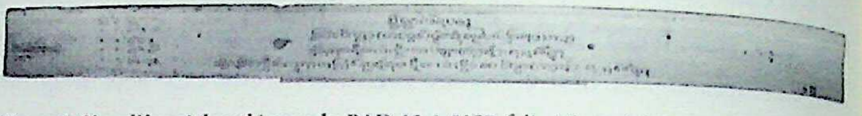


**Figure 3:** *Sòng dòk mai thup thian*, code: BAD-13-1-0157, folio 1 (recto). Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 1944.

**Transliteration:**
สองดอกไม้ธูปเทียน พระวิระจิตโต (คำจันทร์) วัดแสน สร้างไว้ในพระพุทธศาสนา เมื่อวันพุธ ขึ้น ๑๐ ค่ำ เดือน ๑๑ ปีวอก (กาบสัน) พ.ศ. ๒๔๘๗ เพื่อเป็นที่ระลึกในคราวอายุครบ ๒ รอบ วันพุธ ขึ้น ๑๐ ค่ำ เดือน ๑๑ ปีวอก (กาบสัน) พ.ศ. ๒๔๘๗

**Translation:**
[The manuscript entitled] *Sòng dòk mai thup thian* [was made by] Phra Virachitto (Khamchan) from Wat Saen [Sukharam] and to be dedicated to the Buddhist religion on Wednesday, the tenth waxing day of the eleventh lunar month, the Year of the Monkey (*kap san*), BE 2487, in order to commemorate [the completion of] the second twelve-year anniversary cycle on Wednesday, the tenth waxing day of the eleventh lunar month, the Year of Monkey (*kap san*), BE 2487.[10]

*Sòng dòk mai thup thian* and *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok* were inscribed in the same fascicle because the two texts are sometimes read aloud at *Bun Phawet* festivals. For example, at the *Bun Mahachat* festival carried out at Wat Manorom, Luang Prabang, February 17–19, 2017, a *Sòng dòk mai thup thian* sermon was given on the second day (February 18) prior to the *Malai mün malai saen* sermon;[11] the two *Anisong* texts can no doubt be combined. The manuscript was inscribed by the venerable monk and kept in his abode; it can be assumed that he produced and used the manuscript himself.[12]

The following mulberry-paper manuscript displays an interesting dimension of manuscript production. The manuscript is made from pieces of *sa* paper glued together and folded to hand-size, similar to rectangular traditional palm-leaf manuscripts. It was written in February 2004 by a former monk named Thit Niao and contains several texts (in MTM form). The cover page shows a decorated table of contents.

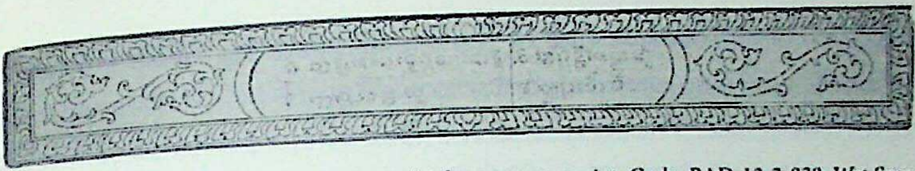


**Figure 4:** The cover of a mulberry paper multiple-text manuscript. Code: BAD-13-2-038; Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 2004.

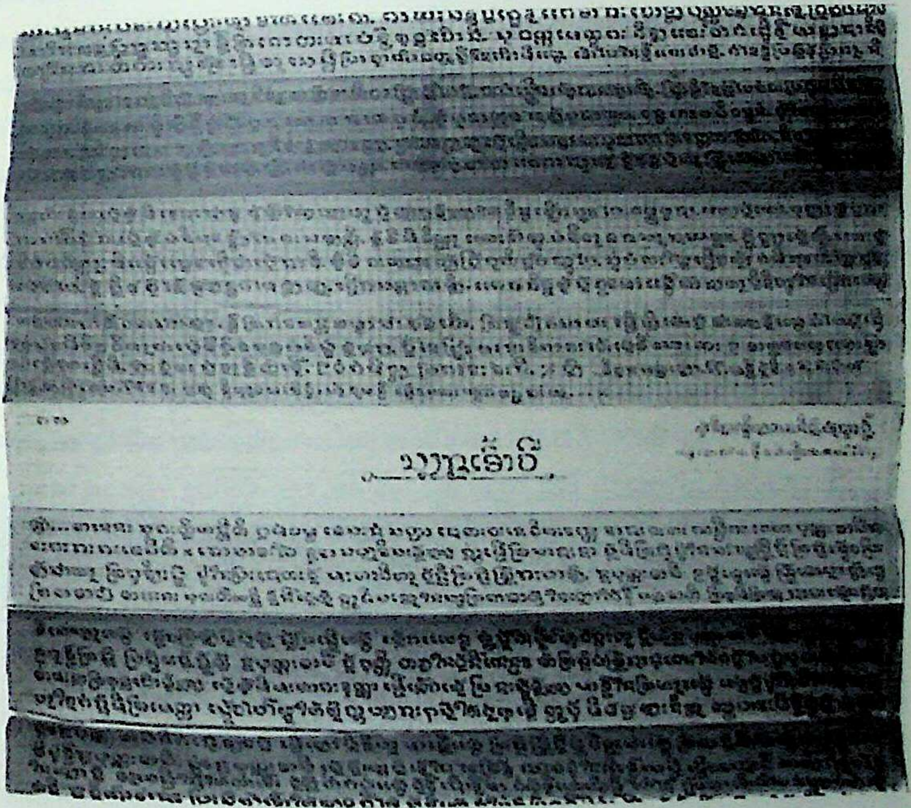


**Figure 5:** Different pieces of paper glued together. Code: BAD-13-2-038; Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 2004.

The manuscript contains four texts: *Salòng maha wetsantara chadok* (Rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*), *Salòng sapphathan* (Rewards derived from donations and gift-giving), *Salòng dòk mai thup thian* (Rewards derived from donations of flowers, incense sticks, and candles), and *Salòng khao ci* (Rewards derived from donations of *khao ci* rice).[13] At the end of the fourth text, the scribe left some underlined blank space after the colophon to be filled in with the sponsor's name. The wishes of and statement by Thit Niao himself were not included; the manuscript could therefore be assumed to be a template for further copies. In addition to *Anisong* manuscripts, Thit Niao Maniwong made other non-*Anisong* manuscripts. I firmly believe he was also the scribe for these manuscripts. His reputation among the *Sangha* or local community was so good that he was requested to make a collection of manuscript prototypes. No further information about him is available, except for a study by Bounleuth Sengsoulin, who mentions his social status pertaining to a specific dating system:

> Thit Niao Manivong (Thit Niao) was a Buddhist scholar in Luang Prabang who followed the newly introduced orthographic system of the Tham Lao script and the new way of writing manuscripts — both the system and the way might have been put into place by Sathu Nyai Khamchan. However, Thit Niao did not use two dating systems in the same manuscript, whereas some manuscripts initiated by Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly contain two dating systems, the Buddhist and Minor Eras. Therefore, Thit Niao had his own way of dating manuscripts (2016, 240–241).

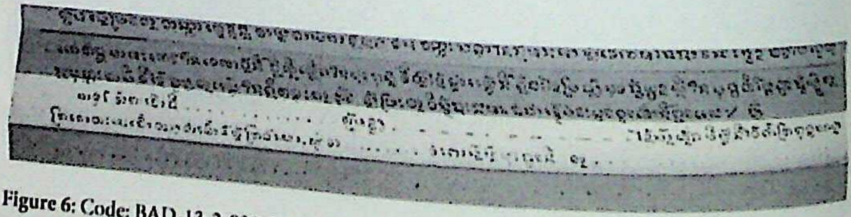


**Figure 6: Code: BAD-13-2-038, Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 2004.**

**Transliteration:**
สาธุๆ ข้าพเจ้าชื่อ . . . พร้อมด้วย . . . ได้สร้างหนังสือผูกนี้ไว้ค้ำพระพุทธศาสนาพระโคตมะเจ้า ตราบต่อเท่า ๕ พันพระพรรษา ผู้ข้า . . . ขอกุศลผลบุญช่วงนี้ ทาน . . .

**Translation:**
Well done! (religious salutation). I, whose name is, . . . , together with, . . . , have copied the manuscript to support the Teachings of the Buddha Gotama to last until the end of five thousand years. I, . . . , may the merit [derived from copying this manuscript] reach to . . .

Among the 10 *Anisong* manuscripts in the corpus, those for reading during 13-episode *Mahachat* preaching outnumber those for the 1,000-rice-ball procession (seven manuscripts and three manuscripts, respectively). Each of the latter has five folios. This reflects the dominant belief in meritorious rewards derived from *Mahachat* preaching over the rice-ball rituals.

## *Anisong* manuscripts and *Bun Phawet* preaching in Laos

*Anisong* sermons are given after the 13-episode *Mahachat* preaching. Manuscripts containing the 13 episodes and those containing *Anisong* texts are thus prepared before the preaching begins and placed in a specific place or container: trays, boxes, or designated spaces in the vicinity of the preacher.

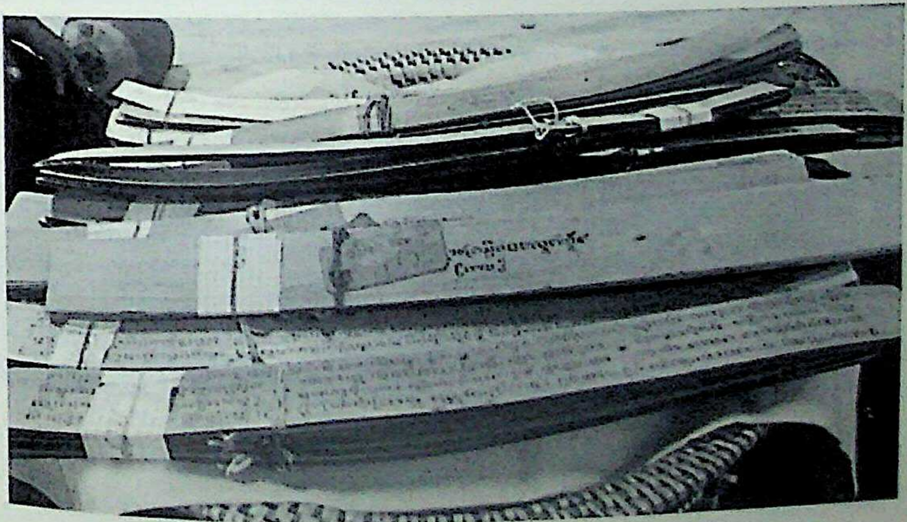


**Figure 7:** Palm-leaf manuscripts containing 13 episodes of *Vessantara Jātaka* prepared on a bamboo tray for preaching in the *Bun Phawet* festival at Wat Wiangsaen Chaiyaram (Wat Phonthan Nüa) in Vientiane on March 5, 2017. (Photograph: Silpsupa Jaengsawang.)

Due to the length of preaching, individual episodes contained in one or more fascicles (Thai: *phuk*) need to be assembled into a manuscript-bundle (Thai: *mat*). Each *phuk* has its title on the first folio to avoid confusion between the manuscripts of the 13 episodes and *Anisong* during the sermons. The following four examples show obvious titles on their cover pages. Unlike the last three manuscripts, the first contains several texts in one fascicle in MTM form. All titles are recorded on the cover folio together with decorations.

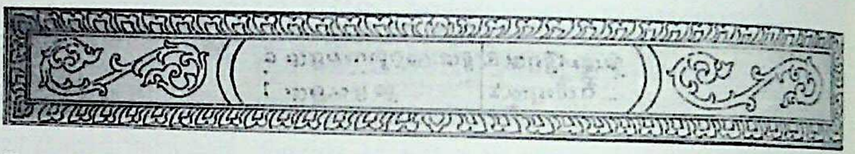


**Figure 8:** A multiple-text manuscript made of mulberry paper. Code: BAD-13-2-038; Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 2004.

**Transliteration:**
๑. สลองมหาเวสสันดรชาดก ๒. สลองสรรพทาน ๓. สลองดอกไม้ธูปเทียน ๔. สลองข้าวจี่

**Translation:**
*Salòng maha wetsantara chadok* (Rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*), *Salòng sapphathan* (Rewards derived from donations and gift-giving), *Salòng dòk mai thup thian* (Rewards derived from donations of flowers, incense sticks, and candles), and *Salòng khao ci* (Rewards derived from donations of *khao ci* rice)

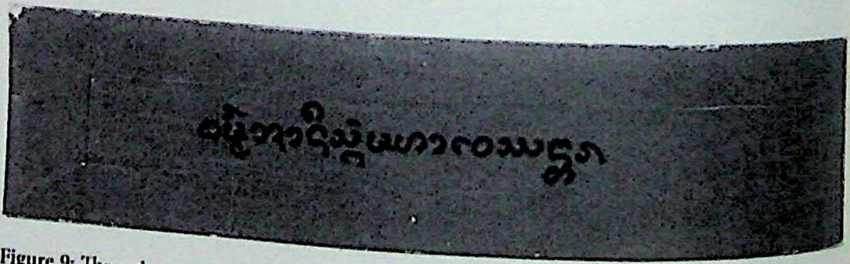


**Figure 9:** The red wooden cover of *Tham Anisong maha wetsantara*. Code: VXC.3; Wat Siang Cai, Luang Namtha, undated.

**Transliteration:**
ธรรมอานิสงส์มหาเวสสันดร

**Translation:**
*Anisong maha wetsandòn* (Rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*)

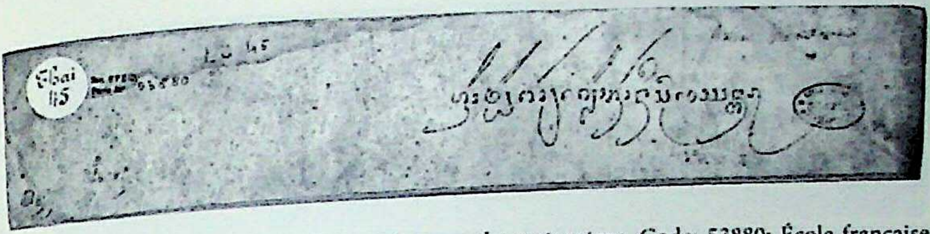


**Figure 10:** The front cover of *Tham anisong maha wetsantara*. Code: 53880; École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), Paris, undated.

**Transliteration:**
หน้าทับพายเคล้าอานิสงส์เวสสันดร

**Translation:**
The verso side following *Anisong wetsandòn* (Rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*)

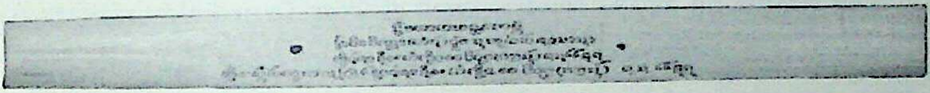


**Figure 11:** *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok*. Code: BAD-13-1-0157; folio 27 (recto), Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 1944.

**Transliteration:**
สองมหาเวสสันดระชาดก พระวิระจิตโต (คำจันทร์) วัดแสน สร้างไว้ในพระพุทธศาสนา เมื่อวันพุธ ขึ้น ๑๐ ค่ำ เดือน ๑๑ ปีวอก (กาบสัน) พ.ศ. ๒๔๘๗ เพื่อเป็นที่ระลึกในคราวอายุครบ ๒ รอบ วันพุธขึ้น ๑๐ ค่ำ เดือน ๑๑ ปีวอก (กาบสัน) พ.ศ. ๒๔๘๗

**Translation:**
[The manuscript entitled] *maha wetsantara chadok* [was made by] Phra Virachitto (Khamchan) from Wat Saen [Sukharam] and to be dedicated to the Buddhist religion on Wednesday, the tenth waxing day of the eleventh lunar month, the Year of the Monkey (*kap san*), BE 2487, in order to commemorate [the completion of] the second twelve-year anniversary cycle on Wednesday, the tenth waxing day of the eleventh lunar month, the Year of the Monkey (*kap san*), BE 2487.[14]

There is no cover folio or cover page in two of the three *Salòng khao phan kòn* manuscripts (Rewards derived from donations of 1,000 rice balls); the texts begin on the recto side of the first folio. Preaching the meritorious rewards gained from offering rice follows immediately after the procession of 1,000 rice balls. There is only one *Anisong* preaching in the ritual; the manuscript can therefore be used independently, without confusion with other manuscripts.

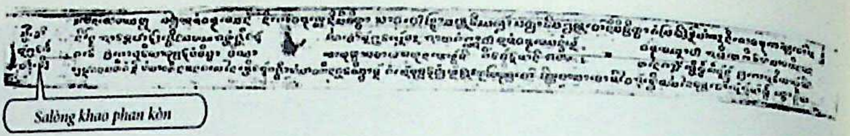


**Figure 12:** *Salòng khao phan kòn*. Code: 06018506007-06; folio 1 (recto). The National Museum, Luang Prabang, 1913.

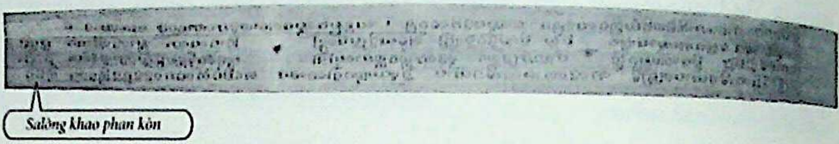
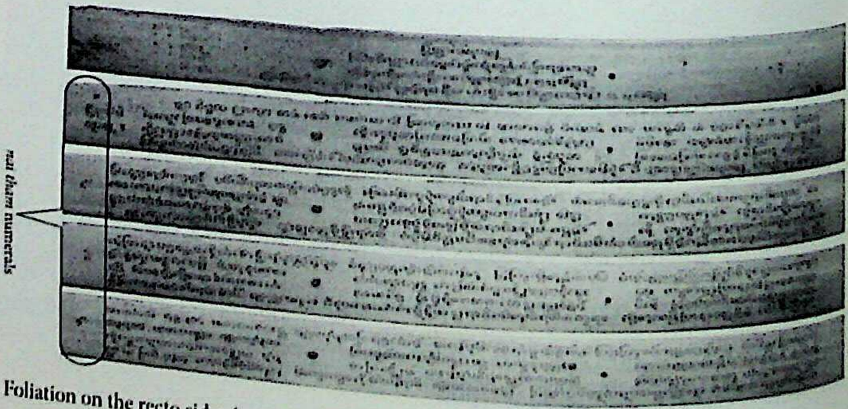
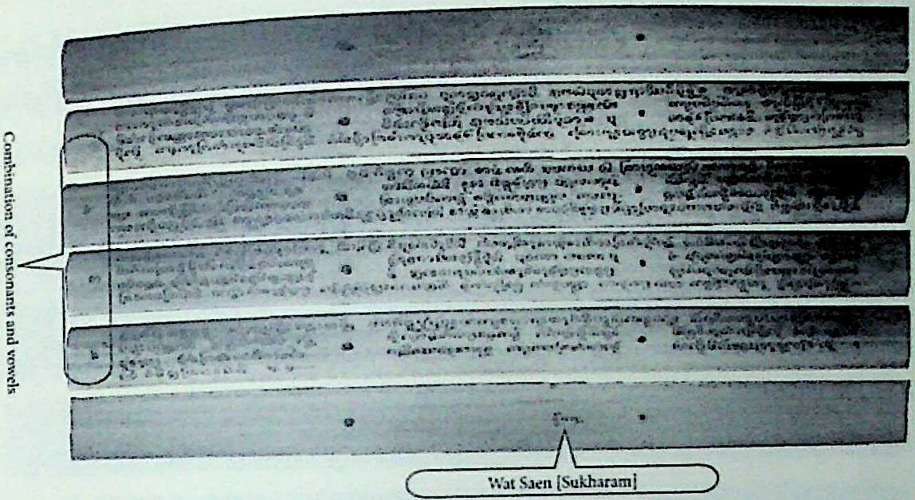


**Figure 13:** *Salòng khao phan kòn*. Code: BAD-13-1-0093; folio 1 (recto). Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, undated.

The following MTM is also kept at Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang. It is composed of *Sòng dòk mai thup thian* (Rewards derived from donations of flowers, incense sticks, and candles), *Sòng fang tham* (Rewards derived from listening to the Dhamma), *Sòng raksa sin* (Rewards derived from following Buddhist precepts), *Sòng phao phi* (Rewards derived from participation in funerals), and *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok* (Rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*). The five texts were separated by at least one blank folio and written in the same fascicle with a single writing template; each template has one folio containing title, date, the specific reason for production, and the scribe's name.



Foliation on the recto sides (*nai tham* numerals)



Foliation on the verso sides — Combination of consonants and vowels

**Figure 14**: *Sòng dòk mai thup thian*. Code: BAD-13-1-0157; folios 1–6 (recto and verso), Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 1944.

Unlike other palm-leaf manuscripts, folio-marker symbols appear on both recto and verso sides. The foliation on the recto sides is marked by *nai tham* numerals,[15] ordering folios by individual texts; the foliation on the verso sides is marked by a combination of consonants and vowels, ordered by orthographic steps of the consonant set running through all five texts of the manuscript. The co-existence of the two foliation styles is an aid to order the folios of the manuscript. The recto sides order folios of the individual texts, and the verso sides order folios of the whole manuscript. Each text can consequently be used by selecting its fascicle then turning to its correct position in the manuscript. In addition, at the end of the first text or *Sòng dòk mai thup thian* (Rewards derived from donations of flowers, incense sticks, and candles), the name of a temple, Wat Saen (Lao: ວັດແສນ), located in Luang Prabang, is written in blue pen as an ownership statement. The manuscript can be assumed to have circulated among local temples as a shared object.[16] The co-existence of two foliation styles implies that individual texts were borrowed by different users; one of the users consequently added a possessive label to indicate the manuscript repository.

Produced in 1990, the following palm-leaf manuscript contains *Salòng khao phan kòn* (Rewards derived from donations of 1,000 rice balls); the text was typed over five pages in the modern Lao script.

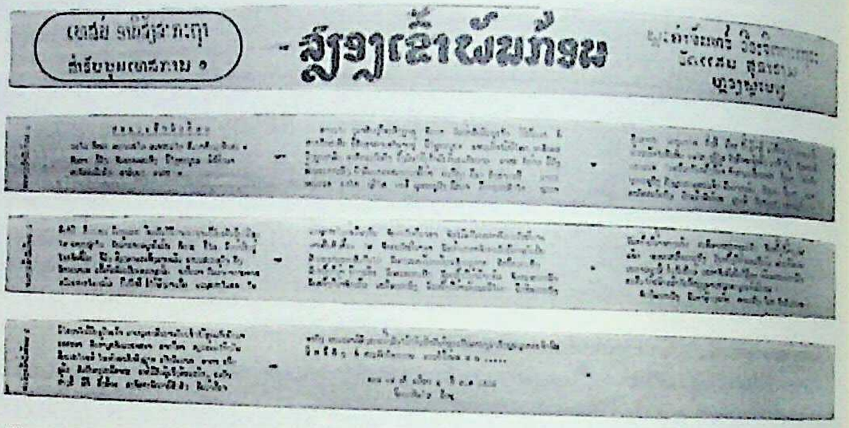


**Figure 15:** *Salòng khao phan kòn*. Code: BAD-13-1-0112; folios 1–4 (recto), Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 1990.

**Transliteration of the text in the red frame:**
เทศน์อานิสงส์กถา สำหรับบุญเทศกาล

**Translation the text in the red frame:**
*Anisong* liturgical text [used] at ceremonial meritorious occasions

The expression on the recto of the first folio indicates the homiletic purpose of the manuscript, It means "an *Anisong* sermon for ceremonial meritorious occasions" (Lao: เทสน์อานิสังสะกะถา สำรับบุนเทสกาน). The manuscript was certainly typed for preaching at *Bun Phawet* festivals in Lao-speaking communities. The length of five pages implies a short sermon, and the use of the modern Lao script indicates that the preachers were perhaps illiterate in the Tham script. This suggests production development to tailor the manuscript for preaching in the festival — that the monks and preachers were no longer expected to be able to read Tham script. This allowed monks who were unfamiliar with the script to preach at the festival at the time of manuscript production (1990).

Typewritten manuscripts date from the 1980s and 1990s. Their purpose was to support monastic and laity education in Luang Prabang.

Phra Virachitto, the venerable monk and abbot of Wat Saen Sukharam, published books on Lao Buddhism that were rarely accessed and barely understood because Tham Lao and Thai scripts were used in extant materials. Many Lao monks lacked familiarity with Buddhist scriptures. Accordingly, he transliterated his books into the Lao script and published thousands of copies of books on Buddhist discipline (*Vinaya*). The following manuscript, entitled *Anisong het bun wan koet* (Rewards derived from merit-making on birthdays), is a reproduction commissioned during that time. According to the colophon, the manuscript *Anisong het bun wan koet* (BAD-13-1-0206) was reproduced by Phra Virachitto in 1988; 3,000 copies of *Vinaya*, Part I (Thai: วินัยภาค ๑), typed by a monk named Cinna Thammo,[17] were also published (Khamvone 2015, 226). The manuscript was typed in the Lao script based on the inscribed original version produced in 1973, thus solving the inconvenience of textual accessibility.

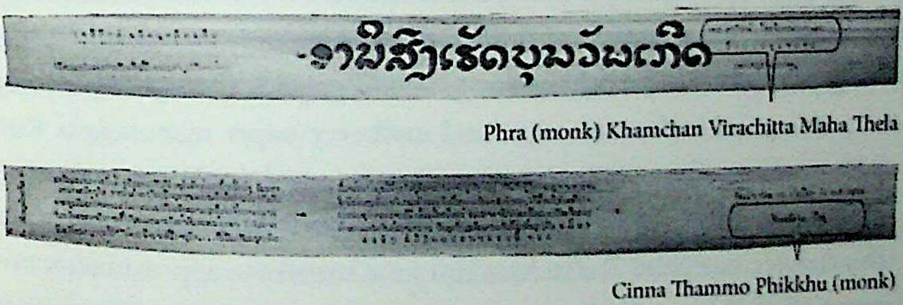

ອານິສົງເຮັດບຸນວັນເກີດ
Phra (monk) Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela
Cinna Thammo Phikkhu (monk)

**Figure 16:** *Anisong het bun wan koet*. Code: BAD-13-1-0206; folios 1 and 5 (recto), Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, CE 1988.

The typewritten manuscript was commissioned based on the original handwritten *Salòng tham bun wan koet* manuscript (code: 06011406005-15), which was sponsored in 1973 by Sathu Yai Somdet Phra Sangkharat Mahathera Thammayan, the Supreme Patriarch, and archived at Wat Mai Suwanna Phumaram (Figure 17). The two manuscripts evidently show almost identical text, with slightly differences caused by spelling corrections.

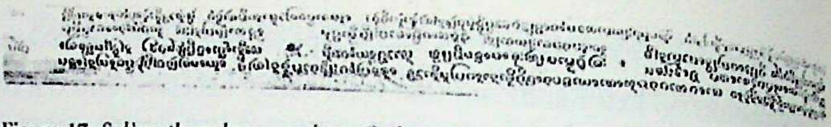


**Figure 17:** *Salòng tham bun wan koet*. Code: 06011406005-15; folio 6 (verso), Wat Mai Suwanna Phumaram, Luang Prabang, 1973.

**Transliteration:**
พุทธศักราชได้ ๒๕๑๖ ตัว ปีกาเป้า เดือน ๙ ขึ้น ๘ ค่ำ ยามกองแลง หมายมีศรัทธา สาธุใหญ่สมเด็จพระสังฆราชมหาเถรธรรมญาณ เป็นเค้ามูลศรัทธา ได้สร้างธรรมผูกนี้ไว้กับพระศาสนา ขอให้ได้ดังมโนรถคำปรารถนาของตนทุกประการแดเทอญ นิพพาน ปจจโย โหตุ อนาคเต กาเล จารย์วันดีอิทธี วัดโคมแสลา เป็นผู้เขียนเน้อ

**Translation:**
In CE 1937, a *ka pao* year, the eighth waxing day of the ninth lunar month,[18] at the time of the sunset drum (*yam kòng laeng*), [the manuscript was sponsored by] Sathu Yai Somdet Phra Sangkharat (Supreme Patriarch) Mahathera Thammayan, a venerable monk, to be dedicated to the Buddhist religion. May all his wishes be fulfilled. *Nibbāna paccayo hotu anāgate kāle* (May this be a condition [to reach] *Nibbāna* in the future). [A]can (teacher) Wandi Itthi from Wat Khom Salao was the scribe.

Length of preaching varies, as already mentioned with regard to *Anisong khao phan kòn* and *Anisong wetsantara* sermons, even though the sermons are usually delivered at *Bun Phawet* festival. The following table shows the numbers of folios or pages these texts occupy. This is integrally linked to preaching duration. The table is arranged by writing material: palm-leaf manuscripts and mulberry-paper manuscripts. One folio consists of two sides, recto and verso, and applies to palm-leaf manuscripts; page-counts are used for mulberry-paper manuscripts. In this chapter, one palm-leaf manuscript folio equates to approximately two pages of mulberry-paper manuscript. “Estimation in folios” in the last column facilitates simpler and more understandable analysis.

| Writing support | Title | | Quantity | | Estimation in folios |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | folios | pages | |
| Palm leaf | 1 | *Salòng khao phan kòn* | 5 | - | 5 |
| | 2 | *Salòng khao phan kòn* | 5 | - | 5 |
| | 3 | *Salòng khao phan kòn* | 5 | - | 5 |
| | 4 | *Salòng wetsantara* | 10 | - | 10 |
| | 5 | *Anisong wetsantara* | 18 | - | 18 |
| | 6 | *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok* | 15 | - | 15 |
| Mulberry paper | 7 | *Salòng maha wetsantara chadok* | - | 32 | 16 |
| | 8 | *Anisong maha wetsantara* | - | 10 | 5 |
| | 9 | *Anisong wetsantara* | - | 8 | 4 |
| | 10 | *Anisong wetsantara* | - | 18 | 9 |

The first three *Anisong* manuscripts are used for preaching after the procession of 1,000 rice balls. Each has five folios carrying quite short texts, indicating short preaching durations. The sixth and seventh manuscripts contain the word *chadok* in their titles, implying stories of previous lives of the Buddha Gotama. These comparatively long texts emphasize events in the Vessantara's birth and describe rewards that can be gained by venerating or listening to each episode.

## *Anisong* texts and the *Bun Phawet* chanting ritual in Laos

The study also focuses on textual analysis of 10 *Anisong* manuscripts. *Anisong wetsantara*, produced in November 1826 in Khòn Kham village, Nalae district in Luang Namtha province, has significant textual features. A monk named Khuna sponsored and inscribed the manuscript. He was certainly educated in Pāli language, so was able to write an introduction and panegyric in Pāli, differentiating it from the other texts in the corpus. He features the venerable monk Saribut's inquiry toward Buddha Gotama about rewards derived from listening to the *Vessantara Jātaka*. The Buddha explained the rewards gained from listening to all 13 episodes.

The numbered prayers summarize the story. The text below is the opening Pāli expression.

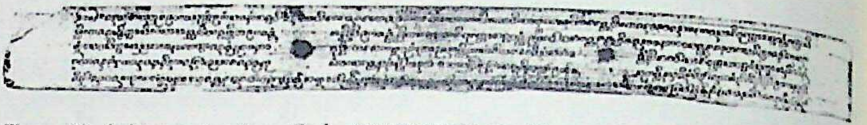


**Figure 18:** *Anisong wetsantara*. Code: 03050507004-04; folio 1 (recto), Khòn Kham village, Nale district, Luang Namtha, 1826.

The text itself includes a narrative,[19] some details from the Buddhist canon or *Tipiṭaka* that is referred to as the textual source by the scribe, and evidence of the author's religious knowledge.

**Transliteration:**

กาลกณฺฑสุตฺตํ วณฺณนา นิตฺถิตา กริยาอันกล่าวยังกาลกัณฑสูตร อันมีในฎีกาจริยา เวสสันตรชาดก มหานิบาต อันสังคายนาเข้ามาในทีฆนิกาย ก็เสด็จบริบูรณ์กาลควรเท่านี้ก่อนแล

**Translation:**

*Kālakaṇḍa suttaṁ vaṇṇanā nitthitā*· The Kālakaṇḍasutta in Dikacariya Wetsantara Chadok of Mahanibat, integrated into the Dīghanikāya, has been completed here.

The text also mentions miraculous abilities (*ñāṇa*) gained from Dhamma attainment[20] and refers to the crystal black sword as a metaphor of attaining the *Nibbāna*:

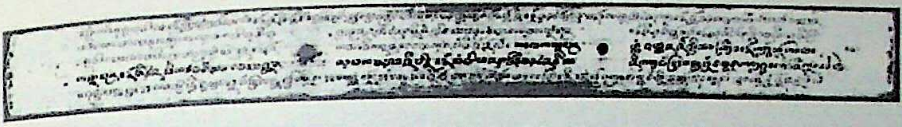


**Figure 19:** *Anisong wetsantara.* Code: 03050507004-04; folio 17 (verso), Khòn Kham village, Nalae distict, Luang Namtha, 1826.

**Transliteration:**
จักได้หักเสียซัดเสียยังอวิชชาตัณหา ด้วยดาบดำแก้ว คือ อรหันตมรรคญาน

**Translation:**
*Avijjā* (ignorance) could be refrained (destroyed) by the *Dap Dam Kaeo* (a crystal black sword) which is regarded as *Nibbāna*.

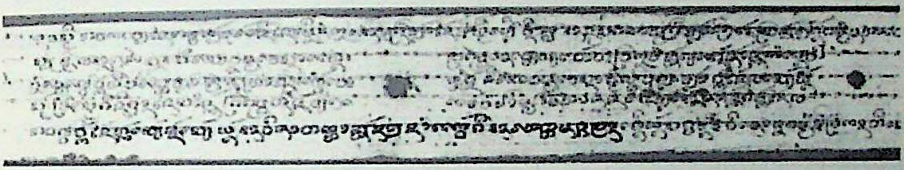


**Figure 20:** *Anisong wetsantara.* Code: 03050507004-04; folio 16 (verso), Khòn Kham village, Nalae district, Luang Namtha, 1826.

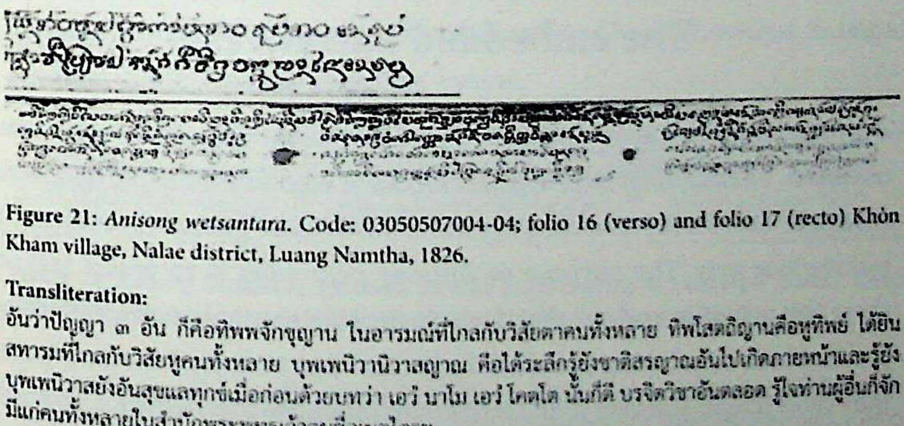


**Figure 21:** *Anisong wetsantara.* Code: 03050507004-04; folio 16 (verso) and folio 17 (recto) Khòn Kham village, Nalae district, Luang Namtha, 1826.

**Transliteration:**
อันว่าปัญญา ๓ อัน ก็คือทิพพจักขุญาน ในอารมณ์ที่ไกลกับวิสัยตาคนทั้งหลาย ทิพโสตฌิญานคือหูทิพย์ ได้ยินสหารมที่ไกลกับวิสัยหูคนทั้งหลาย บุพเพนิวานิวาสญาณ คือได้ระลึกรู้ยังชาติสรญาณอันไปเกิดภายหน้าและรู้ยังบุพเพนิวาสยังอันสุขแลทุกข์เมื่อก่อนด้วยบทว่า เอวํ นาโม เอวํ โคตฺโต นั้นก็ดี บรจิตวิชาอันตลอด รู้ใจท่านผู้อื่นก็จักมีแก่คนทั้งหลายในสำนักพระพุทธเจ้าตนชื่อเมตไตรย

**Translation:**
The three divine wisdoms are the divine eyes or abilities to see things from long-distant places that are inaccessible by human beings; the divine ears or abilities to hear things from long-distant places that are inaccessible by human beings; and the divine perception of births or abilities to know things in the future or previous rebirths as the [Pāli] expression "evaṁ nāmo evaṁ gotto." Perceptions of knowing others' minds are also owned by those who follow the Buddha Metteyya.

In the colophon, the scribe apologizes to readers for his poor handwriting. The manuscript clearly indicates that the scribe expected his manuscript to be used to preach by someone else; it was certainly produced for a homiletic purpose. The manuscript was probably for preaching to a large audience, as the text includes a narrative and additional descriptions derived from the *Tipiṭaka*, which aid the preacher in holding the crowd's attention.

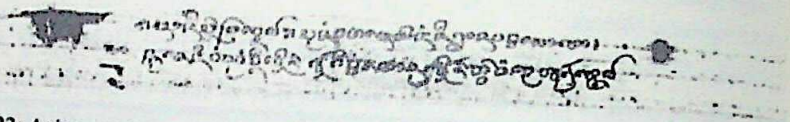


**Figure 22:** *Anisong wetsantara*. Code: 03050507004-04; folio 18 (verso), Khòn Kham village, Nalae district, Luang Namtha, 1826.

**Transliteration:**
ค่อยพิจารณาดูเทอญ ตัวบ่งามยุ่งเหยิงแล

**Translation:**

Please consider my handwriting. It is unattractive and messy.

## The embedded narratives

*Anisong* texts illustrate the benefits of merit-making on a particular occasion. The included narrative(s) cite those who did the same and were reborn in the Heavens, celebrating the rewards to be gained through such meritorious acts. The purpose of *Anisong* preaching is to praise and to show the activities and results of merit-making through examples. They play a role in convincing people to have faith and to appreciate the merits they have made; *Anisong* manuscripts are often used to deliver a sermon by monks during or after ceremonies. There are two basic elements in an *Anisong* text: an introductory text and an embedded narrative. Introductory texts explain the occasion or background to the merit; they sometimes introduce a narrator for the story prior to the embedded narrative.[21] Narratives in an *Anisong* text introduce an exemplary character who performs particular meritorious acts and consequently had an exalted life. This serves to purify listeners' minds. *Anisong* sermons should induce bliss in the listener, contemplating the meritorious acts they have carried out, and reassure people that no such acts are unfruitful — people can look forward to the expected benefits.

Some do not contain any narrative; they merely present the Buddha's detailed descriptions of rewards gained from meritorious acts. Rewards or beneficial returns from merit-making cannot be precisely enumerated. Narrative is thus a device to make rewards more tangible and concrete. Listeners are imbued with a religious belief in the exact outcomes of certain merits; narratives in *Anisong* texts serve this purpose. Embedded narratives are either acquired from such external sources as canonical *Jātakas*, non-canonical *Jātakas*, and prevailing folktales, or they are newly created.

The manuscript of *Anisong wetsantara* (Rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*; code: 03050507004-04; Luang Namtha) contains an embedded narrative about a frog who listened to the Teachings of Buddha and was reborn in Heaven. The storyline is similar to *Manthukathewabutwiman* (Pāli: *maṇḍuka devaputta vimāna*).[22] It is contained in *Mahārathavakka*, *Vimānavatthu*, *Khuddakanikāya*, *Suttanta* sections in the *Tipiṭaka* Buddhist canon.

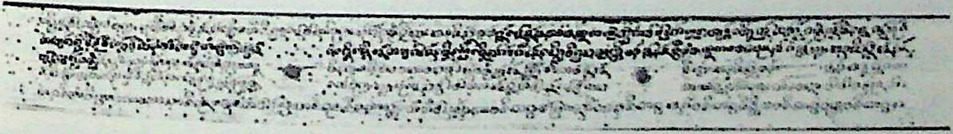


**Figure 23:** *Anisong wetsantara* (Rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*). Code: 03050507004-04; folio 15 (recto), Khòn Kham village, Nalae district, Luang Namtha, 1826.

**Transliteration:**

เป็นดังมหามัณฑกะกบตัว ๑ แลอยู่ใต้กองหยากเยื่อตั้งใจฟังธรรม ยังมีเด็กน้อยผู้ ๑ ไปเลี้ยงวัวยืนอยู่ใกล้ที่ไม้ก็ถากไล่วัว จ้ำหัวกบตัวนั้น ก็ถึงซึ่งอันตาย ก็ได้เมือเกิดเมืองฟ้า ก็ได้เสวยทิพสมบัติมากนัก ได้ชื่อว่ามัณฑกเทวบุตรแล ก็ด้วยผลอานิสงส์อันได้ตั้งใจฟังธรรมนั้น

**Translation:**

[The story] is a comparison to a frog named Mahamanthaka (Mahā Maṇḍaka) living under a pile of rubbish and paying attention to the Buddha's Teachings. [At that time] a child took care of cows and stood in a forest in the vicinity of the frog's habitat. He accidentally killed the frog with a cow-controller stick pressing against the frog's head. Then the frog was reincarnated as a deity in Heaven surrounded by divine property and got the name of Manthaka, rewarded by the meritorious incentives gained from listening to the Dhamma.

The two manuscripts from Luang Prabang bear the same title, *Salòng khao phan kòn*. They also contain similar narratives about a layman who was reincarnated as a heavenly deity, then offered 1,000 rice balls to Lord Buddha as a prosperous man. The motif[23] of offering rice or food to monks or to the Buddha appears in various parts[24] of the Buddhist canon in which the 1,000 rice balls motif is absent. It is possibly added for the traditional rice ball procession at the *Bun Phawet* festival.

## Conclusion

The 10 extant *Anisong* manuscripts analyzed in this chapter are involved in the annual *Bun Phawet* festival and all carry preaching texts to be read by monks. *Bun Phawet* demonstrates the intrinsic belief in blissful heavenly rebirths in the Buddha Metteyya period. In addition to attending 13-episode *Vessantara Jātaka* chanting, people copied manuscripts and dedicated them to monasteries as part of annual meritorious events. The manuscripts were produced within six months before the festival. This reflects the donors' intentions that the manuscripts be used in *Bun Phawet* and demonstrates the usual period for inscribing manuscripts from the ninth month to the twelfth month. Donors also dedicated *Anisong* manuscripts to gain merit for themselves and for the deceased and to ensure a better life in the next Buddha period. The latter conforms with the legend of *Phra Malai*, who was informed by the Buddha Metteyya of his reincarnation at the end of the present 5,000-year Buddhist era. Some manuscripts provided several texts that are preached in *Bun Phawet* festivals because of their convenience; others were made as master versions for further copies by different scribes, thereby spreading the merit. In addition, the less frequent *Anisong* manuscripts containing *Mahachat* or *Vessantara Jātaka* represent the dominant belief in merit derived from paying homage to the *Vessantara* story as opposed to the merit derived from offering 1,000 rice balls to the Buddha or to monks.

Preaching about rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka* follows preaching of the 13 episodes. Titled manuscript covers are thus necessary to avoid confusion. They communicate the distinctive foliation system and a temple name indicating ownership. MTMs that include an *Anisong* preaching text for *Bun Phawet* were intended as communal objects among temples in a certain locality. Insufficient knowledge of the Tham (Dhamma) script is not essential for preaching because some manuscripts have been typewritten in the modern Lao script. Preaching is not particularly restricted to monks who were experts in the Tham script.

Textual analysis of the 10 *Anisong* manuscripts was based on the number of folios. Preaching rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka* is more common than *Anisong khao phan kòn*, because of the respective story lengths. A palm-leaf manuscript inscribed by a monk carries a rather long list of contents list, mentioning references to the Buddhist canon. Titles including the word *chadok* and *jātaka* in the titles are contained in many folios. Such texts explain meritorious rewards from venerating individual episodes from the full story. The narrative of the frog that was accidentally killed by a boy and was reborn in Heaven thanks to his moral attention to the Buddha's teachings is similar to a story in the Buddhist canon. It is embedded in the *Anisong* text as an example of an exemplary character. The 1,000 rice ball motif is not mentioned in the Buddhist canon; it has been added for the traditional rice ball procession as part of the *Bun Phawet* festival. In conclusion, *Anisong* manuscripts incorporate preaching texts for the festival that reveal the relationships between the manuscripts and *Bun Phawet* itself. Even though *Anisong* texts are now mostly found in printed books, features of the festival can be traced through manuscripts as historical clues to religious beliefs and manuscript cultures.

## Endnote: *Anisong* Manuscripts in *Bun Phawet* Festivals in Laos

1. *Phra Malai kham luang* is a non-canonical story that was composed in 1737 by Prince Thammathibet (1715–1755), a viceroy in the Ayutthaya period. He was believed to translate *Malayasut* into Thai and to compile it in *Phra Malai kham luang*. *Malai Sut* (Pāli: *maleyyasutta*) was originally composed in Pāli around 1157 by a monk from Lan Na. Phuttha Wilat, a monk from Chiang Mai, gave more details in *Dika Malai* (Pluang 1980, 201, quoted by Sanit 1984, 189).

2. Although the titles have differed widely, as shown in the table, the textual contents are thematically identical.

3. Meritorious deeds, based on Theravāda Buddhist beliefs, lead to a better rebirth in Heaven, the human world, or the new era of the forthcoming Buddha Metteyya after the end of the present Buddhist period, approximately 2,500 years henceforth. An ideal society will be created in this period, after the end of the current 5,000-year Buddhist era and following the deterioration of Buddhism:

> "After seven days, they would emerge and create a new society based on mutual goodwill and a commitment to morality. Gradually the human lifespan would begin to increase again. Following a period of intense rainfall, the earth would flourish with vegetation, and villages would be thickly populated. The surface of the earth would be as smooth as a drumhead, rice would husk itself, people would be handsome and free from physical disabilities, spouses would be faithful to one another, and all beings would live in harmony. At that time, Metteyya would be born in the human realm and attain enlightenment." (Brereton 1995, 11)

4. In Thailand *Thet Mahachat* are mostly organized toward the end of each year or after the end of the Buddhist-monk retreat as mentioned by Malalasekera (2002, 420) as "The recitation may be performed during the *Sat* (Pāli: *sarada*) or Mid-Year Autumnal Festival in early October or on other special occasions such as the raising of funds for the monastery. The reason why it is usually performed after the Lent is obvious. For during the period October to December, food, especially fish and prawns, is found in abundance, and the people, in particular the country folk have a comparative leisure time, in former days the recitation of the *Maha Chat* might be performed at a private residence in special case or in the preaching hall of the village. Nowadays the performances are confined to the preaching hall within the precincts of a *wat*."

5. 1179 Margasisha 20 = Sunday, December 28, 1817. The seventh day of the week (Saturday) was one day earlier.

6. In many cases in both northern Thai and Lao, the deceased were not specified but randomly mentioned as all related livings or *cao kam nai wen* (เจ้ากรรมนายเวร) who were negatively treated, intentionally or unintentionally, by donors in present and previous lives.

7. 1275 Asvina 15 = Wednesday, October 15, 1913. The third week of the day, however, was a Tuesday, one day earlier.

8. *Sòng dòk mai thup thian* (Rewards derived from the donations of flowers, incense sticks and candles), *Sòng fang tham* (Rewards derived from listening to the Dhamma), *Sòng raksa sin* (Rewards derived from following the Buddhist precepts), *Sòng phao phi* (Rewards derived from participation in funerals), and *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok* (Rewards derived from listening to *Vessantara Jātaka*)

9. The term Multiple-text Manuscript (MTM) was suggested by Professor Harunaga Isaacson during discussions held at Hamburg at DFG Research Group 963 — Manuscript Cultures in Asia and Afrika (2008–2011). MTMs designate codicological units worked in a single operation (Gumbert), with two or more texts or a "production unit" resulting from one production delimited in time and space (Andris, Canart, Maniaci) (Friedrich and Schwarke 2016, 15–16). Each MTM contains several texts in a single fascicle (Thai: *phuk*) or bundle (Thai: *mat*), resulting from a single production run. Moreover, the related term "composite" means a codicological unit made up of formerly independent

units (Friedrich and Schwarke 2016: 16). A composite manuscript in northern Thailand and Laos includes several texts, probably with a similar theme, inscribed by different scribes on different occasions and later combined in a bundle. In 1939, the German medievalist Edward Schröder (1858–1942) distinguished between *Sammelhandschriften* and *Miszellanhandschriften* (Friedrich and Schwarke 2016: 3), called "composite manuscripts" by Lynn Thorndike (1882–1965). These terms essentially refer to "collected manuscripts" and "multiple-text manuscripts"; *Sammelhandschriften*, however, carries a narrative nuance.

10. 1306 Asvina 10 = Wednesday, September 27, 1944.

11. The sermon relates the story of a miraculous monk, *Phra Malai*. He taught denizens of Hell and humans on earth to escape the horrors of Hell by avoiding sinful acts. One day, a poor man bestowed him a lotus, which he dedicated to the celestial Chulamani Chedi in Dawadüng Heaven. He discussed merit-making with the god, Indra. The future Buddha Maitreya (Metteyya) joined in and asked the venerable monk about the human world, because he planned to spread the Buddhist religion after the 5,000 years of the present Buddha Gotama period. People who aim to be reborn in the Maitreya period should listen to the whole *Vessantara Jātaka*. At the end of the Buddha Gotama period comes the *Kaliyuk*, or Dark Age. During the Dark Age people live for only five to ten years in shameless immorality. When the Dark Age ends, the Buddha Maitreya reincarnates and spread the Buddhist religion. He told *Phra Malai* to forward the story of world's future to all people (Sanit Tangthawi 1984, 189).

12. For additional supportive information: "*Anisong* manuscripts and the *Bun Phawet* preaching ritual."

13. *Salòng khao ci* (Rewards derived from the donations of *khao ci* rice) is included in the manuscript. *Bun khao ci* festival is a donation ceremony, specified to be held during the third month, and consequently known as *Bun düan sam* (Merit-making event in the third month). The *Bun khao ci* festival under examination in Luang Prabang was held on the first waning day of the third month (in 2017). This is one day before the fifteenth waxing day of the third lunar month, or the *Makha Bucha* festival as mentioned by Parinyan Phikkhu: นอกจากบุญข้าวจี่นี้แล้ว ปัจจุบันนี้เพิ่มการทำบุญมาฆะบูชาเข้ามาอีก เพราะมาฆะบูชาก็เป็นวันสำคัญอีกวันหนึ่ง มาฆะบูชานี้ตรงกับวันเพ็ญ เดือนสาม (In addition to making merit at *Bun Khaochi*, *Makha Bucha* festival is an additional (religious) significant day of meritorious activities. *Makha Bucha* is held on the fifteenth waxing day of the third lunar month.) (1952: 62) The festival in Laos is held one month or less before the *Bun Phawet* festival. Presumably, the scribe included the *Salòng khao ci* text in the manuscript for easy use on the two occasions held close together.

14. 1306 Asvina 10 = Wednesday, September 27, 1944.

15. *Nai tham* numerals are found in palm-leaf, mulberry paper, and industrial paper manuscripts from northern Thailand and Laos. They are more frequently use for pagination/foliation than *hora* numerals because of the religious purpose of the manuscripts. *Nai tham* numerals were commonly used in religious manuscripts while *hora* numerals were used for calculations in astrological manuscripts (Bunkhit 2005, 38).

16. Manuscripts could be circulated among local temples as shared objects. They were sometimes kept in a certain monastery and borrowed by monks from other temples.

17. In 1988, Cinna Thammo reproduced another palm-leaf manuscript using a typewriter sponsored by Phra Virachitto. He was more or less responsible for Buddhist book publication projects during the 1980s and 1990s. He was known for his collaboration with Phra Virachitto, whom he assisted as a typist. His typewritten manuscripts followed a single format. Pha Chanthalin is also mentioned by Bounleuth (2015): "Interestingly, the one who copied the former manuscript and composed the latter is the same person, Chinnathammo Phikkhu (Bhikkhu), whose common name is Pha Chanthalin. He is one of the senior monks who were close disciples of Pha Khamchan. Apart from the names of the scribes and compilers, no message has been left in these manuscripts to demonstrate the reason for writing/copying and compiling these manuscripts for Pha Khamchan. However, one might assume that Pha Chanthalin was acting in the tradition of making manuscripts for someone whom he held in highest esteem" (2015, 254).

18. 1299 Sravana 8 = Sunday August 15, 1937.

19. The embedded narrative is analyzed and explained later in the chapter.

20. Six divine abilities, or the six *Apiññā*, consist of supernatural powers (invisibility, levitation, burrowing), divine listening (hearing things over impossible distances), divine perceptions (mind-reading), divine perception of former incarnations (knowing things from previous lives), divine sight (seeing things over impossible distances), and divine knowledge of desire eradication (knowing how to eliminate desires).

21. Arthid (2012, 39–41) explains that narratives are significant in *anisong* texts because they make benefits from gifts more tangible. They have stock plotlines and characters and are derived from different sources — Suttas, *Dhammapada aṭṭhakathā*, the commentary of *Apadāna*, *Paññāsa Jātaka*, and new and nonclassical compositions — evidencing the richness of textual tradition in Thai Buddhism.

22. พระผู้มีพระภาคตรัสถามมัณฑุกเทพบุตรว่า [๕๑] ใครมีวรรณะงามยิ่งนัก รุ่งเรืองด้วยฤทธิ์และยศ ยังทิศทั้งปวงให้สว่างไสว ไหว้เท้าทั้งสองของเราอยู่? มัณฑุกเทพบุตรกราบทูลว่า เมื่อชาติก่อน ข้าพระองค์ เป็นกบเที่ยวหาอาหารอยู่ในน้ำ เมื่อข้าพระองค์กำลังฟังธรรมของพระองค์อยู่ คนเลี้ยงโคได้ฆ่าข้าพระองค์ ขอพระองค์ทรงดูฤทธิ์ ยศ อานุภาพ ผิวพรรณและความรุ่งเรืองของข้าพระองค์ผู้มีจิตเลื่อมใสครู่หนึ่งเท่านั้น ข้าแต่พระโคดม ก็ผู้ใดได้ฟังธรรมของพระองค์สิ้นกาลนาน ผู้นั้นถึงได้บรรลุนิพพานอันเป็นฐานะไม่หวั่นไหวเป็น สถานที่ที่ไปแล้วไม่เศร้าโศกเป็นแน่.

**Translation:** Lord Buddha asks the deity Manthaka: "Who are you who have fair skin with powerful and honorable glory shining in all directions and are saluting me on my feet?" Manthaka replies: "I lived as a frog surviving underwater with food in my previous life. I was killed by a cattle boy when I was listening to your teachings. Please take a look for a short while at my power, rank, almighty ability, complexion, prosperity, and religious faith. Those who always listen to your teachings could attain permanent and misery-free *Nibbāna*.

23. "Motif" (Thai: อนุภาค means characteristic or distinctive elements, events, things, etc. that make a story more memorable and sometimes differentiate a story from others.

24. For example, *Sunisawiman* (Pāli: *suṇisā vimāna*) in *Piṭhavakka*, *Vimānavatthu*, *Khuddakanikāya*, the Suttanta section, *Kaluthayitherapathan* (Pāli: *kāḷudāyītherapadāna*) in *Kunaḍadhānavakka*, *Therāpadāna*, *Khuḍḍakanikāya*, the Suttanta section and *Suchinatitatherapathan* (Pāli: *sucinatitatherāpadāna*) in *Sakiṃsaṃmajjakavakka*, *Therāpadāna*, *Khuḍḍakanikāya*, and the Suttanta section.

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# Phra Malai's "Naughty Monks"?: Jesters as Grief Counselors

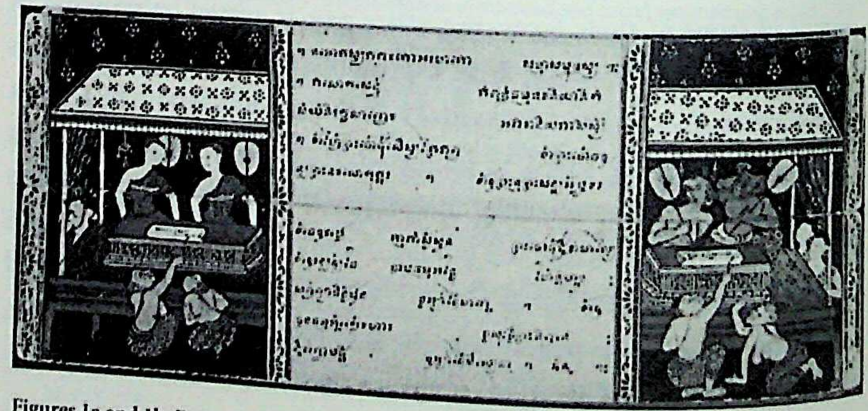
## BONNIE PACALA BRERETON

One of the most popular texts featured in 18th and 19th century mulberry-paper manuscripts (*samut khòi*) in Thailand is *Phra Malai Klòn Suat* (*PMKS; klòn* means "verse," and *suat* means "to chant"), the vernacular story of the magical monk who travelled through hells and to Tavatimsa Heaven. These accordion-style "leporello" manuscripts typically contain miniature paintings depicting key scenes from the story. They may also display funerary scenes, including portraits of two pairs of monks: one pair is seated formally, legs crossed and holding a *talabat* (a fan-like object) in front of their faces; the other pair is seated or standing in curious postures with strange facial expressions. Several Western scholars have written about these portraits, but their interpretations are not convincing as they are based on suppositions and guesswork rather than evidence. This chapter reiterates an interpretation I first proposed more than two decades ago based the unique characteristics of the *Phra Malai Klòn Suat* text, the writings of Thai scholars, my fieldwork and personal communications with people who have sponsored or participated in recitations of the text (Brereton, 1992 and 1995).

# Introduction

The story of *Phra Malai* is known to Buddhists throughout Thailand. It exists in numerous versions or "tellings," a term originally used by A.K. Ramanujan in reference to the many versions of the *Ramayana* (1991).[1] While all *Phra Malai* tellings share the same storyline, they differ in language (or dialect), emphasis, poetic form, literary style, and the ritual setting in which they are recited. Key scenes and iconographic images from the narrative are depicted in various genres of painting and sculpture. This chapter focuses on leporello mulberry-paper manuscripts (*samut khoi*) created during the late-18th and 19th centuries containing the popular *PMKS* rendition.

*PMKS* was commonly recited at wakes in parts of central and southern Thailand (but not in the north or northeast, which are ethnically and culturally different) from the Ayutthaya period until the early 20th century. There is a common misconception that it is no longer chanted, which is discussed later.[2] *PMKS* manuscripts are known for their miniature paintings illustrating scenes from the narrative and from funeral scenes that feature two pairs of monks (Figure 1a and 1b).



Figures 1a and 1b: From Igunma, p. 39. (British Library, Or.16007).

Western scholars have puzzled over these figures and have generally interpreted them negatively, as depictions of "naughty" monks (Igunma, 2016), as "laymen satirizing ritual chanting" (Skilling and Pakdeekham, 2017, 141), and as a way of contrasting "pious monks" with "lax ones" (Ginsburg 1989, 77).

The methodology used by these scholars is mostly guesswork, with no inquiry into Thai sources. This chapter examines what Thai scholars say about the *PMKS* text, the role of the chanters at funeral wakes, and the current status of *PMKS* chanting. This evidence suggests that the chanters played an important role at wakes. Rather than being criticized or satirized, they were applauded and appreciated by manuscript sponsors and wake attendees alike.

## The *Phra Malai* story[3]

Phra Malai was a saintly monk who lived long ago on the island of Lanka. Because of the abundant merit that he had accrued in his past lives, he was endowed with supernatural powers like those of the Buddha's disciple, Moggallana, who could fly to Hell and to Tavatimsa Heaven. He eased the sufferings of the Hell beings and listened to their pleas to tell their relatives in the human realm about their plight. Returning to the human realm, he conveyed their requests so that they could be reborn in a better place.

One morning as he was going on his alms rounds, Phra Malai encountered a poor man who presented him with eight lotuses. He asked that through this offering he would never again be born poor. After accepting the offering, Phra Malai pondered over what to do with the lotuses. He decided to fly to Tavatimsa Heaven to present them at the Culamani Cetiya, where a hair relic of the Buddha is enshrined.[4] There he met the god Indra, who had built the *cetiya* (a structure used by Theravada Buddhists to memorialize Gautama Buddha), and witnessed a series of deities arriving for worship, surrounded by progressively larger retinues, each dressed in a different color.[5] Indra told Phra Malai the acts that each deity had performed to earn sufficient merit to be born in Heaven.[6] All had practiced a specific act of *dāna* (generosity), such as giving food to a starving crow, presenting offerings to a monk, sponsoring cremations, planting bodhi trees, cleaning temple grounds and others.

Eventually the Bodhisatta Metteya arrived from his abode in Tusita Heaven to worship the reliquary. He asked Phra Malai about the inhabitants of the human realm (the Jambu continent or Chomphudvipa). The monk replied that they lived in diverse circumstances and made merit in numerous ways, all in the hope of meeting Metteyya when he becomes the next Buddha. The Bodhisatta gave Phra Malai the following message: *Those who wish to meet me should participate fully in the Vessantara Jātaka festival for one day and one night, avoid sin, and practice* dana. Metteyya described a series of tumultuous events that will precede his coming: primarily the disappearance of Gotama Buddha's teachings,[7] followed by the degeneration of morality into a period of violence and internecine carnage. However, a small number of righteous people will retreat into caves and emerge after the carnage to form a new moral society. Eventually the world will regenerate because of the gradual accumulation of merit by virtuous people. A Utopian age will follow, characterized by perfection of nature and society. At that time, Metteyya will accept the invitation of celestials to be born in the human realm, where he will reach enlightenment and preach the dhamma. The text of the *Phra Malai* story ends with the monk's return to the human realm to deliver this message.

This is the basic version of the story, as found in the Pāli *Māleyyedeva Maleyyadevatthera-vatthu*, the Northern Thai *Malai Ton-Malai Plai*, and the Lao-Isan *Malai Mün-Malai Saen*. The latter two paired texts are recited at annual festivals centered on the *Vessantara Jātaka* in the north and northeast, respectively. They are inscribed on palm-leaf manuscripts, rather than written on paper manuscripts, are not illustrated, and are read in a perfunctory manner before the main event of the festival, the *Vessantara Jātaka* recitation.

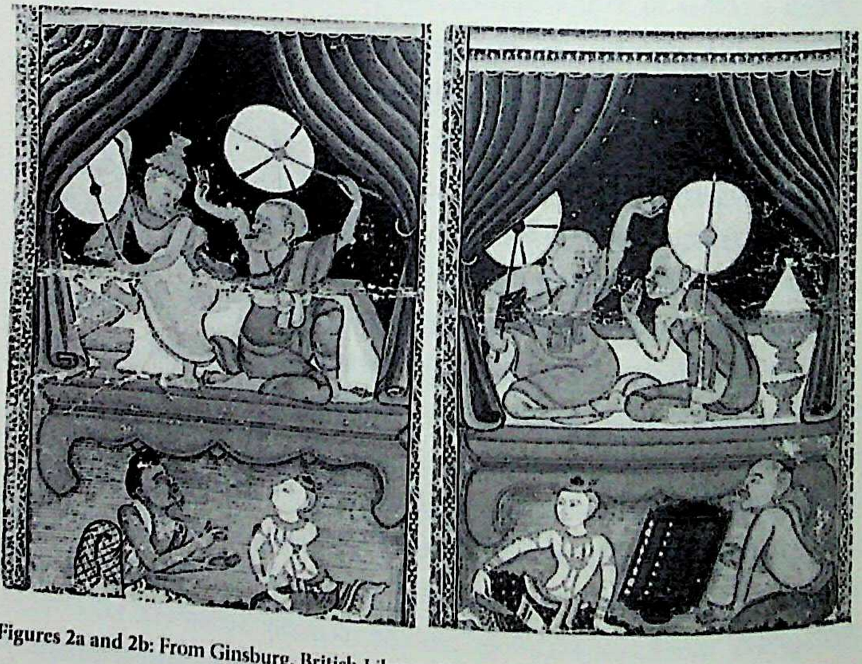
*Phra Malai* also exists in a "royal version," *Phra Malai Kham Luang* (PMKL), attributed to Ayutthaya Prince Thammathibet. It is laden with elaborate Pāli- and Sanskrit-derived words and expressions. All of these versions of *Phra Malai* are solemn in tone and in fact rather unexciting.

Both *PMKL* and *PMKS* date from the 18th century and are based on the Pāli *Maleyyadevatthera-vatthu*. *PMKS* is unique in several important ways, the most obvious being its folksy narrative style, its role at wakes,[8] and its vivid descriptions of the sufferings of Hell and the sins that led to these karmic consequences.[9]

## *PMKS* in manuscript paintings and the so-called "naughty monks"

*PMKS* began to appear in manuscripts in the late-18th century; it became a prevalent theme during the 19th century (Ginsburg 1989, 72). In these manuscripts, the Thai text is written in the Khòm script. On about 5% to 10% of the pages, the text is confined to the center and is flanked by miniature paintings illustrating key scenes from the narrative.[10] These scenes appear in thematically related pairs: for example, a poor man picking lotuses in a pond on one side of the text and the same man presenting the lotuses to Phra Malai on the other. One striking scene is the future degeneration and regeneration of society, with people in violent conflict on one side and people performing serene acts of merit on the other. In addition to events from the story, there are scenes associated with funerary activities, such as the washing of the body and four monks seated on a platform with a manuscript box in front of them. In some paintings, the monks sit with legs crossed formally. In others, however, they assume comic dance poses, are often unshaven and have grotesque facial expressions (Figures 2a and 2b).

Who are these strange monks and what have scholars said about them? Let's first see what Westerners have to say. The late Henry Ginsburg, a pioneer in the study of Thai manuscripts at the British Library, compared these pairs of monks to the contrasting scenes of degeneration and subsequent regeneration of society; initially, he proposed that "pious monks" are contrasted with "lax ones" (1989, 77).[11] Later, he referred to the depictions in Figure 2a and 2b as a "satirical scene of false monks reciting the *Phra Malai* text when ordained monks were forbidden from doing so" (2000, 107). This prohibition was part of a comprehensive series of royal edicts known as *Kotmai Tra Sam Duang*, or the Three Seals Code, issued by King Rama I (Lingat, 1962). However, the word "satirical" suggests that these portraits appear in the manuscripts to teach the impropriety of such behavior. Ginsburg does not identify the recipients of this teaching, nor does he cite any substantiating Thai sources apart from the Three Seals Code.



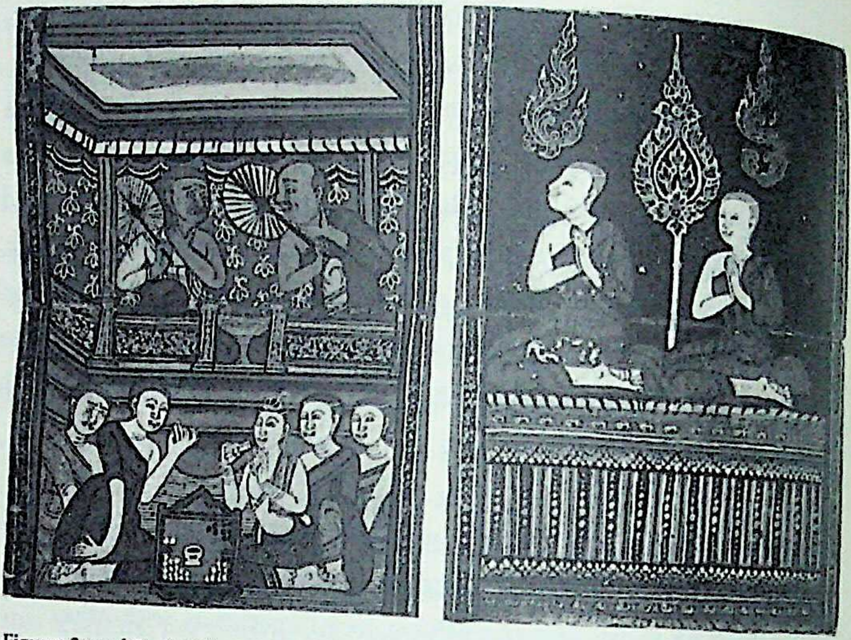
**Figures 2a and 2b: From Ginsburg, British Library, Or.14838; dated 1849.**

These so-called "false monks," according to Thai scholars are *kharūhat*, meaning lay people. They, and the monk chanters who preceded them, played an important role at wakes (Brereton, 1992, 1995). Nandha Khunphakdee (1987), Surapone Virulrak (1980), and other Thai scholars describe how four monks (after Rama I's decree, four laymen) would recite *PMKS* with made-up faces, false mustaches, eye glasses, and hats, in comic parodies of various ethnic groups, including the Chinese, Malay, Mon, Vietnamese, Lao, and others. These performances provided an element of levity to wakes. Virulrak, drawing on the writings of Dhanit Yupho and Montri Tramot, writes:

> The audience in those days did not feel that this was out of place. On the contrary, they appreciated and supported the performance by insisting those priests perform in competitions with other entertainments. The priests usually won because they gained a greater audience (Virulrak 1980, 38–43).

This evidence, however, was dismissed as "far-fetched" by Jana Igunma, Ginsburg curator at the British Library: "Historical eye-witness reports of Thai *ngān hū̄an dī* and funeral ceremonies fail to mention any involvement of misbehaving monks" (Igunma, 2016, 31). Using the unsubstantiated "good monk-bad monk" assumption as evidence, she takes her baseless argument a step further, arguing,

> The trend in 19th century Thai manuscript painting contrasting illustrations of "good" and "bad" monks within one manuscript may point toward an educational or propagandistic purpose of the paintings directed at monks and novices, which seems even more probable in the light of the Dhammayutika reform movement . . . (48).



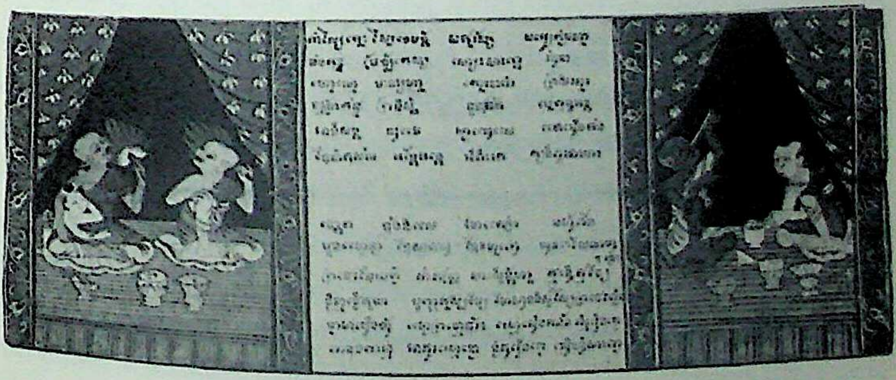
Figures 3a and 3b: British Library, Or.14664 folios 3 and 6.

Figures 3a and 3b are from two different folios. According to Igunma, these show "naughty monks" on the left and "role model" monks on the right. The monks on the left sit with one knee up, holding one hand to their throats. After careful comparison of numerous examples, Igunma echoes Ginsburg's unsupported interpretation of the paintings as "contrasting illustrations of good and bad monks for educational purposes directed at monks and novices" (2016, 48). What is the logic of this assumption, given that *Phra Malai* manuscripts were costly to produce and commissioned to make merit for the deceased? Such "educational purposes" seem at odds with the cultural context of pre-modern Thai Buddhist wakes, where "friends of the deceased" who watched over the body for several nights, were hosted with alcohol and entertainment.

The good-versus-bad explanation is rejected by Barend J. Terwiel, who does cite a Thai source — albeit a dubious one. He recollects a village monk who told him that "in former times Buddhist monks drank alcohol and danced at ceremonies for the dead" (2012, 12). Building on his memory of this vague remark, he reaches a different, but equally unfounded conclusion, that the monks were:

> ". . . in an intoxicated state. They indulged in drugs, . . . they chanted in ecstasy, they went into trance and, like Phra Malai, and uncounted generations of shamans before them, they travelled in trance to the other worlds, thereby accompanying the spirit of the deceased to the world of the dead."

Unfortunately, Terwiel does not support this statement with evidence from fieldwork by himself or anyone else. He refers to the paintings shown in Figures 4a and 4b. In the painting on the right, according to Terwiel, monks appear to be taking drugs; while in the painting on the left a childlike figure, that he curiously identifies as "a young woman," is sitting on a monk's lap. Scenes like this are not found in any other *Phra Malai* manuscripts. Moreover, the authenticity of this manuscript has been questioned by Igunma, who examined its condition, its texts, and the use of imported paint. She concluded that "It is unlikely that it was produced as a funeral book." Rather, it "may have been commissioned by a Westerner, or was produced to be sold to a Westerner." (2016, 42).



Figures 4a and 4b. British Library, Add.15347, circa 1838.

# *Phra Malai Klòn Suat* as a work of folk literature

It is surprising is that the conclusions of Western scholars have been accepted even though they neglected to examine the *PMKS* text, itself – its contents, the actual words, its literary style.[12] Several things are immediately apparent when reading the text. First, *PMKS* is written in colorful, colloquial, often sensationalistic, language with details of the everyday life of ordinary villagers. This is a sharp contrast to the elegant royal version, the unexciting Pāli version, and the pair of texts preceding the *Vessantara Jātaka* in the north and northeast. For example, the *PMKS* adds earthy details about a poor man who presents lotuses to Phra Malai; his reason for going to the pond is "to wash the sweat from his body."

Second, *PMKS* contains much repetition, suggesting that it was used as a teaching text restating information to aid memory. In fact, it served as a textbook for temple novices in the early 20th century. This is supported by the diaries of Somdet Pun Punnasiri (1897–1973),[13] published in Kamala Tiyavanich's book, *The Buddha in the Jungle* (2003). The monk recalled that as a novice living in Wat Song Phinong in Suphanburi in the central region: "We had fun reading *Phra Malai*. We recited the verses together out loud. The poetic words made them easy to memorize" (Kamala 307).

Third, *PMKS* contains greatly expanded descriptions of Hell, the suffering and anguish of its inhabitants,[14] and the sins that led to those karmic results. In fact, *PMKS*'s heavy emphasis on Hell can be seen in two sections early in the text: a concise list of sins and karmic consequences and a vivid description of the Hell-beings. These two adjacent sections contain the same information, but the latter emphasizes the gory details of suffering. The colloquial, sometimes coarse, nature of *PMKS* can be seen in the example I pointed out over two decades ago:

> Another type of *preta* was a hideous-looking woman. Her body was completely covered with boils, decayed and decomposing. Her toenails and fingernails were rotten, with no way to cure them. Those boils oozed out pus constantly.
>
> This woman scratched and peeled the boils and ate them every day, regularly . . .
>
> At dusk, at dawn and at noon. They quickly became decayed and soft . . . Her whole body turned to pus.
>
> Vultures, crows, and cranes pecked and chopped [at her], swooping down from the sky. Slashing at her mouth and nose, pecking at her ears, nibbling at her eyes were vultures, crows, and herons . . .
>
> Her sin [was that] in her former life this woman claimed to be a spirit medium. [Claiming powers of spirit possession], she'd say: "I'm your father," "I'm your mother," "I'm your grandfather," "I'm your grandmother."
>
> "Me, I'm one of the family. I'll help you get better. Promise me a duck, a chicken, a cow, a buffalo — a great big one with a huge liver in its belly."
>
> "Take some money and tie it to the neck of a pot as an offering with candles and gold, some betel in a container, some strong whiskey, together with an offering of rice and fish — complete with heads and tails."
>
> Pretending to be a spirit medium, she became hideous and rotten. She tricked people, leading them to believe her. The sin of lying caused the slaughter of ducks and chickens. Her toenails are all rotten, her hands are decayed and hideous (Brereton 1995, 115).

Moreover, the text is sprinkled with earthy humor, such as the description of another Hell being:

> There was another type of suffering ghost who was in great torment. He had testicles as large as water jugs. They hung down to the ground like a *yam* shoulder bag. Rotten and putrid, bloated and stinking, they were like slimy snails.
>
> Whenever he wanted to go somewhere, he'd fling them over his shoulder, stagger under their weight, and reel from side to side. When he wanted to sit down, they'd get pinched between his legs, and he'd have to stand up, and then sit down on top of them.
>
> When he wanted to sit down, he was bent over with pain. He'd slowly straighten up, get up, [and] "ouch" fling then over his shoulder, and stagger on his way under their weight, "ouch, ouch," getting weaker all the time (ibid).

In some *PMKS* performances I have witnessed, the chanters delivered passages through catchy melodies, interjecting exaggerated moans (*Oy, oy, oy, oy!!*). The juxtaposition of frightening sounds and images with bawdy humor makes this text unique.

The populist appeal of *PMKS* can be seen by comparing a segment from the text with parallel segments from other versions of the *Phra Malai* story. This excerpt from the Pāli *Māleyyadevattheravatthuṁ* is Metteyya's reply to *Phra Malai*'s question about when he will become the next Buddha:

> . . . the dispensation of Gotama Buddha will last 5,000 years and [then] disappear. When it has disappeared there will be an abundance of bad actions in the world. Even the word "good" will not exist — how much less the occurrence of good [actions]! Gradually human beings will lose [all] conscience and [sense of] shame, breaking [all] rules: they will not consider "this is my mother, my daughter, my sister or grandmother," and will be [as] shameless as goats, sheep, chickens, pigs, jackals, dogs, and the like. Then gradually, because of

> their abundant bad actions, human beings will deteriorate and (come to) have a lifetime of 10 years (Collins, 1993).

The next extract is from the Thai *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, which is very similar in tone:

> . . . when the sacred teachings of the eminent Gotama, Lord of the World, have been in existence for 5,000 years, they will disappear completely. The elements of the world will become scattered and dispersed. Defilement will increase and virtue will decline. The human race will degenerate. All people will lose their sense of shame. Then there will occur an epidemic of incest within families — with one's mother and daughter, sister and grandmother — resembling the mating of foxes and pigs, dogs, and goats. With their perceptions so distorted, [people] will not be ashamed to sin so audaciously. Like animals in hear they will be burning with lust. [This] immorality will cause the lifespan of living beings to decrease. What was originally a 100 years will gradually diminish to 10 years.

*PMKS*, by contrast, goes into considerable and sometimes sensationalistic details about incestuous relationships, with much repetition and gusto!

> When the religion of Samana Gotama reaches a state of decline, everyone will commit a lot of sins and make little merit. They will be unwilling to practice generosity, observe precepts, and meditate. They'll be unwilling to support the Three Jewels. They'll tempt each other to sin. Crude and vulgar, they won't be afraid or ashamed. They'll caress their mothers — the ones who gave birth to them. They won't be embarrassed about having sexual relations with their own mothers, with their aunts. Aroused by sexual passion, they'll be out of control. They'll have sex with nuns. Lacking fear and respect, they

will be wild and unruly. They will be involved in improper sexual relations with their own sisters, even with their mothers. Relishing sexual pleasure, they'll have no shame.

Women and men will all have sex without shame, without remembering who nourished them as children. They will violate these boundaries like pigs, dogs, and deer. They will lack fear and shame. Just like four-legged animals. They'll live together with their daughters, and after a while, they'll crave fleeting pleasures. Some evil men, totally without shame, will have sex with their own mothers-in-law, with their caretakers.

They'll have sexual relations with the same people who raised them. They'll have sex with their caretakers, with their wet nurses, they'll have sex with anyone, with their sisters-in-law. Both women and men will be out of control, sinning like this, so shamelessly. [They'll have sex] with their own daughters, they won't even think of what they're doing. They'll act like dogs and pigs, goats and deer, four-legged creatures. At that time those in the world of *samsara* will not live very long. When their lives are over and they die, they will fall into Hell, where they will suffer terribly because of their sins. They will stay in Hell for an entire *kappa* because of their wickedness in having sex with their mother.

Some women will take a boy and raise him as their son. After a while, they'll treat this child like a husband. Some men will take a girl and raise her as their daughter. Then they'll become drunk with desire to have sex with her. Both women and men, when they die at the end of their lives, because of their sins in becoming drunk with desire, will suffer terribly because of their immoral acts. Their lifespan will then decrease day by day, till they live only to the age of 10. Little children only four months old — both girls and boys — will look for someone to marry; they'll have wives and husbands.

Little girls, four months old, will try to make themselves look appealing. Boys of four months will be concerned with getting a wife

> quickly. At five months they'll have children. Those children will be grown up at four months and take care of themselves. Because of sins such as these [incestuous situations mentioned above], lives will be short, people will die quickly; by the time they're 10, they'll be dead (Brereton 1995, 104–106).

## Thai scholars writing on *Phra Malai*

It is puzzling why Thai scholars have been ignored by other Western researchers as their writings are numerous. In addition to those cited in my earlier research (Brereton 1992, 1995), Thai literature scholar Trisilpa Boonkachorn has written an epic 400-page book on the *klòn suat* genre of literature (Trisilpa 2004). It explains that *klon suat* refers to poetic works that aim to teach the dharma while providing entertainment and fun. *PMKS* is the most famous *klon suat* work. It was chanted at wakes to teach about merit and demerit and reward and punishment, but it also provided lively entertainment to alleviate the grief and sorrow of the mourners (Trisilpa 2004, 3, 5).

*Cham uat phra* is a form of comical chanting by monks performed in the presence of the deceased. Trisilpa (2004, 7, citing Sathit Senanil 2521, 38–39) explains that following a death, relatives would invite monks to their house to chant the *Abhidhamma* in front of the body. However, the sponsor of the wake felt obligated to provide entertainment for mourners who had travelled far and were staying one or several nights before the cremation. The monks would first chant the *Abhidhamma* after which they or a *kharühat* group performed comedy routines often full of obscene expressions.

Thai scholars invariably point out that the audience appreciated such performances. To provide variety and prevent boredom, *suat kharühat* groups performed extracts from famous works of Thai literature, including *Krai Thong* and *Phra Aphai Mani*. Other experts confirm this assertion, including Nandha Khunphakdee, retired professor of Thai language from Silapakorn University at Nakhon Pathom, and Anake Nawigamue, renowned writer on Thai culture, who organized diverse traditional Siamese performances at the Bangkok Bank Musical Art Center for 23 years.

Anthropologist and literary critic Cholthira Satyawadhna, agrees, rejecting the good-versus-bad monk interpretation:

> *Suat Malai* is a play, in other words, a Buddhist performance. Unfortunately, the Siam royal house did not have fun with this sort of folk theatre art, . . . staged by local monks . . . That is why it was forbidden for monks to *suat* [chant] *Malai*. Therefore, this folk ritual performance was transferred to *kharühat* who had [been] ordained as monks for [many] *phansa* and could gain the experience of this kind of chanting and role-playing . . . As *kharühat*, they then put more vivid role-playing to the stage chant, conserving *suat* until today (e-mail communication, May 20, 2017).

Thai scholars concur that *PMKS* is a script for a comic play that was performed at wakes. It was intended to be sung to a variety of melodies and rhythms. The text is written in three varieties of a verse form known as *kap*, providing rhythmic diversity suitable for narration, description, and conversation. As in other works of literature that were written to be performed, such as the *Ramakien*, cues and stage directions appear in front of the stanzas to indicate changes in verse form.

A description of such a funeral performance is found in the epic tale, *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* (*KCKP*), translated by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (2010, 50–54). The monk performers mimic the "twelve languages" of various ethnic groups, wearing corresponding costumes, makeup, and wigs. Parts are raucous — even obscene — as in this example from *KCKP*.

> Up came two Farang monks, opened their mouths wide, rolled their eyes, and sang with heads shaking. They bashed their bottoms together, sat down, shook their bodies, fondled themselves for the audience to see, and sang . . . [A Farang monk and a Khaek monk then fought each other with their fans.] They went at each other crazily, one drunk on liquor, the other smashed on ganja . . . The crowd watching in front roared in appreciation (ibid., 53–54).

The monks who performed the *PMKS* comical chanting were appreciated for the levity they lent to situations of sadness and grief. Even today, it is not unusual to find comic performances, such as *likay*, right outside temple grounds, and certain aspects of funerals often incorporate light-hearted humor with a sexual overtone.[15]

## *PMKS* performances in the 21st century

*PMKS* is still recited both by monks and by *kharühat*. Monks from Wat Daowadueng chant at this temple and at several other temples in the Don Muang area of Bangkok. The chanting has a moving, sacred quality, reminiscent of Roman Catholic Gregorian chant. By contrast, *kharühat* groups in villages in central and southern regions perform in a more animated, sometimes boisterous style. Many video clips of such performances can be found on YouTube. I contacted a person who had uploaded a clip recorded at the wake of his father. He explained the reason for the chanting: "When my father died, [the *kharühat*] chanted to achieve a sense of fun and a not-too quiet funeral. You can find chanting in many villages of Bang Lamung district, Chonburi province. This is our tradition. The chanting is not available for all of the old people who died, but only those who were respected in the village" (Facebook Messenger, May 17, 2017).

The contemporary *suat kharühat* groups that I have seen on YouTube have several things in common. Members sit on the floor directly in front of the coffin. The text is a modern leporello folded-paper facsimile on heavy coated paper. The members of most groups are middle-aged or older; however, some feature members who appear to be less than 40 years old. Some groups use a *talabat* and perform dance-like movements with their arms and postures; others merely sit in a circle. All the groups play lively melodies and are earnest about their role as "friends of the deceased." There are regional variations in the melodies, the composition of the chanting groups, the musical instruments accompanying the chanting, and some of the beliefs in the efficacy of the performance. The proceedings usually begin with a *wai khru* ceremony paying respect to their teachers and brief chanting of Pāli scriptures. Some groups include both women and men, but males dominate.

One such group in Ban Nong Khao, Tha Muang district, Kanchanaburi province, was the focus of doctoral research by Poramin Jaruworn (1999), a Chulalongkorn University professor of Thai language and folklore. His in-depth study found that the chanters were men over the age of 40 and that they chant 22 melodies. The strength of the tradition is aided by the village's long history, a living culture of mutual help, and a shared belief in the same ancestral spirits among villagers.

There is also a *Phra Malai* page on Facebook[16] with informative text, numerous photographs of a *kharühat* group known as Khana Nai Kaew in Nakhon Si Thammarat province, and links to performances on YouTube. The most recent post is from 2012, when the group consisted of 12 people, including 2 women and some elderly members. In addition to singers, each with a specific role in the chanting chorus, musicians play various instruments, including the *ramana* (drum), *saw* (spiked fiddle), *klui* (flute), and *ching* (finger cymbals). The group has received awards for preserving local culture and has performed at a seminar at Walailak University.

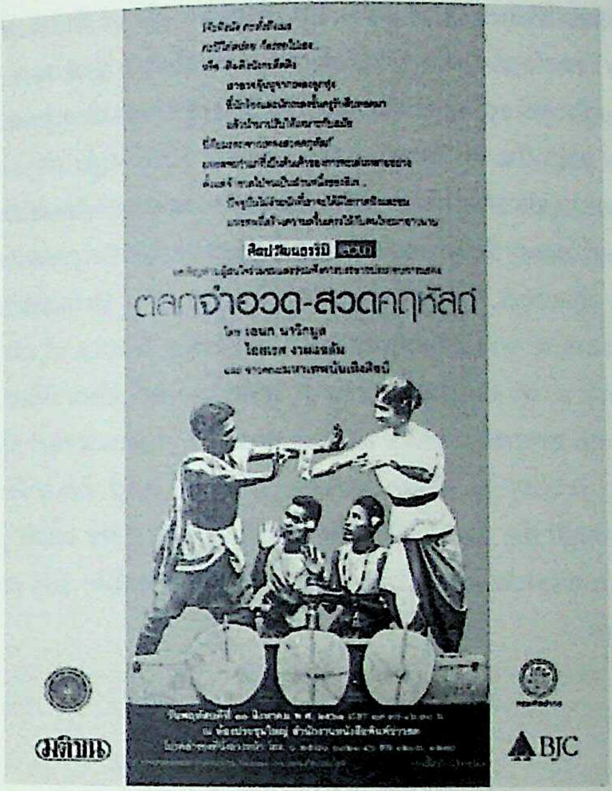


**Figure 5:** Poster advertising the colloquium, *Talok Cham Uat — Suat Kharühat* (the comedy of *Cham Uat* and *Suat Kharühat*)

Moreover, *suat kharühat* is currently taught and performed at Ramkhamhaeng University by Iyaresh Ngamchalaem, lecturer and founder of a *kharühat* group known as Khana Mahathep Bantheung that is featured on YouTube. Iyaresh, who specializes in the traditional performing arts of central and southern Thailand, participated in the colloquium, *Talok Cham Uat — Suat Kharühat* (the comedy of *Cham Uat* and *Suat Kharühat*), along with an esteemed 82-year-old musician, Chana Chamniratchakit (aka Khru Lek).[17] The colloquium was held at the Matichon Newspaper auditorium in Bangkok and moderated by Anake Nawigamune. The comments of the participants confirmed much of my own research and shed light on numerous other aspects of comic chanting at wakes. For example, the overnight vigil of *fao sop* (watching over the body) evolved from traditional fear that a ghost disguised as a black cat might jump over the body, disrupting the passage of the deceased.[18] To help the mourners stay awake, intervals of monotonous chanting by monks are alternated with lively, boisterous *kharühat* comedy routines. Indeed, many *Phra Malai* manuscripts include paintings of both monks and lay chanters, the latter often holding their throats (Figure 3a). At the colloquium, it was explained that the long hours of chanting and performing took a toll on the voices of monks and *kharühat*. Thus, the inclusion of both proper monks and clowns in manuscript illustrations represents the reality of some wakes: monks and *kharühat* groups alternating through the night. The insights provided by such performers as Chana Chamniratchakit (Khru Lek) are invaluable for interpreting *PMKS* paintings.

## Conclusion

Western scholars attempting to explain paintings of strange-looking monks in *Phra Malai Klon Suat samut khoi* manuscripts have ignored the text itself, the recital context, and, most importantly, the research of Thai scholars who have studied the *klon suat* genre and the phenomenon of *suat kharühat*.

A *PMKS* manuscript is more than a collection of miniature paintings. Rather, it is a script for performing the *PMKS* text, complete with cue words that function as stage directions to accompany the melodies and rhythms. Initially monks, and later laypersons, performed the text at funeral wakes to keep the attendees awake throughout the night and to ease the grieving process. Paintings of these performers were included in the manuscripts to illustrate their important roles. They were appreciated for their ability to lighten the ambiance at wakes and to provide emotional and moral support for mourners. *Phra Malai Klon Suat* manuscripts were created in an historical and cultural context that needs to be studied in its entirety, not just from the perspective of disapproval of the bawdy nature of the chanting. Moreover, is important for non-Thai scholars to include the writings and oral traditions of Thai scholars in their work. It is also necessary to read the text they are discussing to avoid making erroneous statements that may be assumed to be based on facts rather than conjecture.

## Endnotes: Phra Malai's "Naughty Monks"?: Jesters as Grief Counselors

1. For discussion of this term in relation to *Phra Malai* texts, see Collins, 1993.

2. Skilling and Pakdeekham (2017, 134). Erratum: my book is referred to as an English translation of a *klon suat* version (2017, 129, note 7); it is a translation of the royal version, *PMKL*.

3. For a discussion of the sources on which the basic *Phra Malai* texts are based, see Brereton 1992 and 1995; Collins 1993; Denis,1953 and 1965; and Supaporn Makchang 1978 and 1981.

4. Some versions mention the Buddha's tooth relic as well as a hair relic.

5. Note that the deities are all male, while their retinues consist of females.

6. Continued merit making is necessary for spiritual progression, since lives in Tavatimsa Heaven are transient.

7. The teachings are predicted to disappear after 5,000 years. This prophecy is mentioned by both the 14th century King Luethai of Sukhothai and in earlier remarks by the great 5th century commentator Buddhaghosa (Coedes 1957).

8. Some references mention recitals at weddings, but without documentation or descriptions. PMKS was not recited in northern or northeastern Thailand, which are ethnically different from the central and southern regions.

9. In addition to these tellings, there are less prominent versions of the Phra Malai story written in the 20th and 21st centuries (Brereton 1992, 1995). These include the Pāli *Maleyyavathudipani-tika*, composed by the monk Phra Phutthawilat, and its Thai translation, *Dika Malai Thewa Sut*. Another is *Phra Malai Sam Thammat*, in which the text is divided into three parts: *Phra Malai*, *Indra*, and *Metteyya* (to be read by three different monks). In northern Thailand, the story is best known through the *Kham Muang* language *Malai Phot Lok* (Malai Bestows Mercy on the World), which is still recited at wakes and private merit-making occasions. It is a brief text that relates *Phra Malai's* visit to Hell. It is read in a subdued manner, rather than chanted or sung, often by a single monk.

10. Other common paired paintings: 1) deities or other heavenly beings; 2) grotesque inhabitants of Hell, often climbing a thorn tree; 3) the monk Phra Malai seated next to the deity Indra in front of the Cūḷāmaṇi Cetiya and groups of flying deities; 4) people in violent conflict while others make offerings to monks; 5) devout laypeople listening to Phra Malai and people surrounding a wishing tree laden with jewelry and elegant cloth.

11. Ginsburg wrote that Metteyya will usher in the era of goodness following the time of carnage. In fact, the text states that the righteous people themselves, after surviving the age of carnage, will form a society based on moral principles and practices. Thereafter, Metteyya will arrive.

12. Another Western scholar of Buddhism, Justin McDaniel, wrote about a manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library, which was "described as a *Phra Malai* text," with illustrations that left him "perplexed." They included depictions of "seemingly drunken Buddhist monks chanting while children played dice-like games in front of them," and "fighting thugs, lecherous men, gambling and amorous couples." Were these scenes, he wonders, "supposed to represent different levels of Hell?" (McDaniel, 2015, 1-2). To those who have read *PMKS*, clearly these scenes are illustrations to Bodhisatta Metteyya describing to *Phra Malai* the future degeneration of society. Although McDaniel is a brilliant scholar, his comments suggest that he did not read the text. He write: "The story of *Phra Malai* recalls Dante's journey past the abyss and into various levels of Hell." However, he neglects to mention the monk's journey to Tavatimsa Heaven, which is a major element in the text. Thus, he erroneously viewed scenes of vice, sex, and fighting as "metaphors for levels of Hell" rather than part of Metteyya's important warning about the future.

13. Kamala notes that he later became the abbot of "Bodhi Monastery in Bangkok." I assume she means Wat Pho.

14. In *PMKS*, *preta* refers to inhabitants of Hell, although the word usually refers to a specific suffering, the curse of having a small mouth, a large stomach, and an insatiable appetite.

15. Louis Gabaude noted that at northern cremations, which traditionally feature pyrotechnic displays, people hearing the sound of firecrackers exploding (in the case of a deceased male) remark that "the testicles are cracking!" (ห่ำแตก)

16. See https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=phra%20malai

17. The colloquium, *Talok Cham Uat — Suat Kharühat* (the comedy of *Cham Uat* and *Suat Kharühat*) took place at the Matichon newspaper auditorium, August 30, 2018.

18. This fear of a black cat jumping across the body was mentioned in an M.A. thesis about funeral practices among Lao migrants to the US by Susan Phay (2013): "The casket was watched at all times, like a security guard at a bank. There was a great fear that a black cat will come near and jump across the casket. It was believed that a black cat was actually a ghost, attempting to awake the body while it has not been properly buried. As people come and go throughout the day, someone, typically the elders, are watching the casket. Of course, they may be socializing with each other, or taking care of the donations, but one of their main purposes was to watch out for a black cat."

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# A Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* from the late Ayutthaya era

## JANA IGUNMA

*Paññāsa Jātaka* are usually associated with Northern Thailand (the former kingdom of Lan Na). However, the motifs and storylines of many such *Jātaka* (extra-canonical birth stories) have found their way into neighboring Thai and Lao literary cultures. The Lao of the Vientiane kingdom created their own text, known as *Sang Sinsai*, based on the motif of *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* (Golden Conch Birth Story). It was reportedly first written down in Lao language by Pangkham, a Lao writer thought to have lived in the 17th century. The Lao text has become popular throughout Laos thanks to the research and publications of Maha Sila Viravong, Douangdeuane Bounyavong, and Outhine Bounyavong. In Thailand, the Lao and Lao Isan versions of *Sang Sinsai* have been researched and retold by various academic and popular authors.

A Thai translation of *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* entitled *Sangthòng* is well known nationwide. It has been published in prose and as juvenile literature numerous times since the 1920s. A dramatized version of *Sangthòng* was created by Phra Phutthaloetla Naphalai (King Rama II) at the beginning of the 19th century.

Although *Sang Sinchai* is a less-popular central Thai text, Phra Phutthaloetla Naphalai (King Rama II), Phra Nangklao (King Rama III), and Prince Naritsaranuwattiwong (son of King Mongkut or King Rama IV) all wrote dramatizations of *Sang Sinchai*, or parts of it, during the

19th century. It is a misapprehension that *Sang Sinchai* is simply the Thai mispronunciation of *Sang Sinsai*.

In the late 1950s or early 1960s, a fragmented manuscript in folded-book format containing the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* was discovered at the British Museum and transferred to the British Library in 1973. The content of this manuscript, accurately dated prior to 1796, is a retelling of an older text that was lost or destroyed, most probably during the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767.

This chapter investigates the provenance and history of the British Library's *Sang Sinchai* manuscript. It also examines the content of this manuscript, in particular the storyline, characters, text style, and similarities and differences with *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* and the Lao text of *Sang Sinsai*. It concludes with conjecture over the circumstances of this manuscript's creation and the possible motivations of the scribe, who remains anonymous.

## Introduction

The popularity of the *Sang Sinsai* story is largely attributable to the tireless work of Maha Sila Viravong, a Lao scholar born in 1905 and raised in northeast Thailand. He carried out extensive research at the National Library and National Archives in Bangkok, as well as at the National Library of Laos in Vientiane. Sila Viravong's first published transcriptions of *Sang Sinsai*, together with a 20-page foreword, were published by the Kasuang Thammakan (Ministry of Religion) in Vientiane in 1949 (part 1) and 1951 (part 2). Subsequent editions in Lao language were issued in 1954, 1958, 1966, 1967 (four volumes), 1969, 1971, 1974, 1977 (four volumes), and 1983; translations into other languages have also been published. From 1991, the editing and publishing efforts of Douangdeuane Bounyavong and Outhine Bounyavong led to the publication of a number of revised and extended Lao-language editions of *Sang Sinsai*, including juvenile editions, with further translations into foreign languages. More systematic research works on *Sang Sinsai* include Thongkham Onemanisone's *The wisdom of Sinxay and the role of Soumountha* (2012, Lao language) and *Sinxay: Renaissance of a Lao-Thai Epic Hero* by Peter and Baythong Sayouvin Whittlesey (2015).

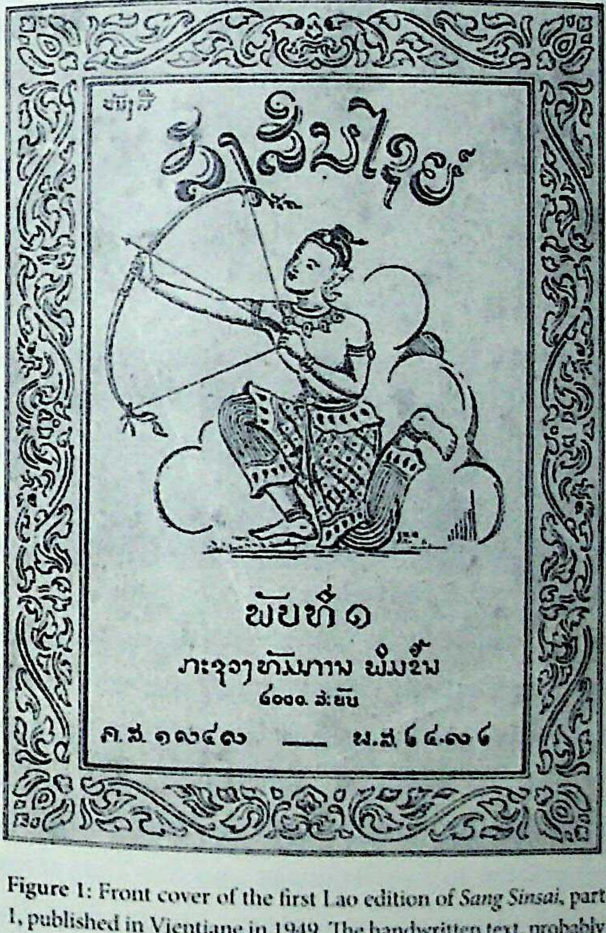


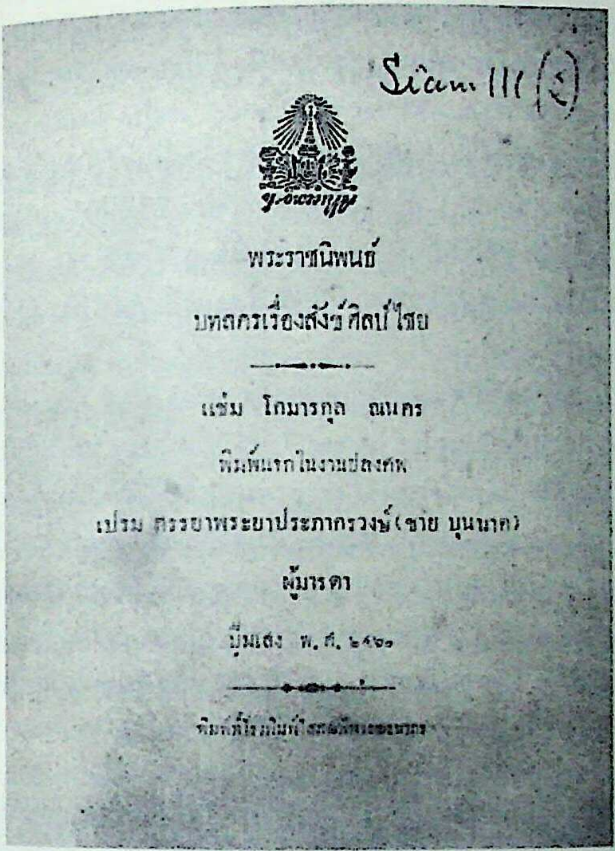
**Figure 1:** Front cover of the first Lao edition of *Sang Sinsai*, part 1, published in Vientiane in 1949. The handwritten text, probably by Maha Sila Viravong, was reproduced by lithographic printing.

The Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* no longer enjoys great popularity. It is barely known among the younger generation, although it once was a well-known and much-loved literary work, akin to the popular story of *Sangthòng* today. The first known printed work in Thai featuring a dramatization of *Sang Sinchai* was by Phra Phutthaloetla Naphalai (King Rama II, 1767–1824). Published in 1917 by Rongphim Sophon (Sophon Printing) with a preface by Prince Damrong, this was the first dramatization of this story by a Thai royal. In the preface, Damrong mentions that King Rama II wrote the drama based on the ancient story of *Sang Sinchai*, which had been known since the Ayutthaya period (*Sang Sinchai* 1917, [3] Foreword). A reprint of this work with a different text layout was published in 1922 by Rongphim Thai (Thai Printing) in a collection of works by King Rama II under the title *Bot lakhòn nòk*.

Another dramatized version, by a son of King Mongkut (King Rama IV), Prince Naritsaranuwattiwong (1863–1947), appeared in 1924 in a collection of his works entitled *Prachum bot lakhòn dükdamban: chabap luang*. It is in two parts, *Sang Sinchai phak ton* and *Sang Sinchai phak plai*. Both parts were reprinted in 1928 and again around 1930. King Nangklao (King Rama III, 1788–1851), half-brother of King Mongkut, composed yet another dramatized version of *Sang Sinchai*, which was published in 1930 as *Bot lakhòn rüang Sang Sinchai*, reprinted in 1937. The reissue of Phra Phutthaloetla Naphalai's drama was combined with another of his works in 1965 under the title *Botlakhòn nòk rüang khawi lae Sang Sinchai*.

A number of Thai publications contain the term *Sang Sinchai* in the title, but it is not always entirely clear whether they contain the Lao text of *Sang Sinsai* or the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai*. More comparative research is necessary.

*Klòn lam lao rüang Sang Sinchai* is a book from the 1920s (exact date not known) printed in Lao language and the Thai script. In 1941, P. Ninpradap published a northern Thai text (in standard Thai) of *Sang Sinchai* in seven volumes, entitled *Sang Sinchai: klòn chao nüa*. This was cited as the third edition, although nothing is known of the first two editions. In the same year, M. Buathara brought out a book containing a Lao text in *klòn* (Lao: *kòn*) verse in five volumes, *Sang Sinchai: klòn lao* (indicated as the second edition, but the date of the first edition is unknown).



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พระราชนิพนธ์

บทลครเรื่องสังข์ศิลป์ไชย

แช่ม โกมารกุล ณนคร

พิมพ์แจกในงานปลงศพ

เปรม ภรรยาพระยาประภากรวงษ์ (ชาย บุนนาค)

ผู้มารดา

ปีมเส็ง พ.ศ. ๒๔๖๐

**Figure 2: Front cover of a dramatization of *Sang Sinchai*, published in 1917.**

Subsequent editions of the Lao text in the Thai script appeared in 1947 (*Sang Sinchai tòn 1 samnuan wannakhadi isan* edited by Y. Chittrakhup Prichayan); in 1948/49 (*Rüang Sang Sinchai* edited by Bunčhan in four volumes); 1957–1964 (*Nithan Sang Sinchai: kham klòn boran phak isan* by Chinda Duangchai in seven volumes); in 1958 (*Sang Sinchai* by Aphiwat (Thòngdi) Sariphan in three volumes); and in many subsequent editions, including for juvenile readers. In 1980, a Thai translation of a Lao Isan version of *Sang Sinsai*, prepared by the Thai scholar Pricha Phinthòng (Phra Sriham Sophon Pricha), was published with the title *Sang Sinchai* (สังข์ศิลป์ชัย). Although the wording of the *Sang Sinsai* text in this publication is almost identical to Sila Viravong's publications, it was a translation of a palm-leaf manuscript owned by Mrs. Bang-òn Phuriphat of Ubon Ratchathani province, not of Sila Viravong's work.

More Thai research works are dedicated to the study of the Lao Isan text of *Sang Sinsai* than of dramatized text versions from central Thailand. No comparative studies of the different central Thai, northern Thai, Lao Isan, and Lao texts of *Sang Sinchai* and *Sang Sinsai* appear to exist. It is often assumed that *Sang Sinchai* is a Thai retelling of the Lao Isan version of *Sang Sinsai*.

In 1969, a manuscript containing a central Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* was brought to the attention of the Thai Ministry of Education. It was found at Wat Pa Mok in Ang Thong province. The temple is renowned for its huge reclining Buddha statue. Pa Mok is mentioned in the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya in a military context, being a strategic point for the Burmese and Ayutthaya armies. The text in this manuscript is in *klòn suat* verse, intended for recitation, and was published by the Ministry of Education under the guidance of Sukit Nimmanahaeminda (*Sang Sinchai*, 1969). An abridgement of this text, edited by Wichian Ketprathum, was published in 2004 (Ketprathum 2004).

The Wat Pa Mok text is similar to a (fragmented) version of *Sang Sinchai* that was discovered at the British Museum prior to 1969 (probably around 1958) by Thai historian, Khachòn Sukhaphanit. He took a copy of the British Museum manuscript back to Thailand on microfilm. Similar manuscript versions are allegedly held at the National Library of Thailand. The 1969 publication by the Ministry of Education is a compilation of manuscripts found at the British Museum, at Wat Pa Mok, and at the National Library in Bangkok, all either fragmented or in such poor condition that parts are illegible. The manuscripts complement each other, facilitating an almost complete version. This edition of *Sang Sinchai klòn suat* is the most extensive version; the dramatizations from the 19th century only emphasize certain parts of the story.

# The Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* from the Ayutthaya period at the British Library

The manuscript at the British Library containing the story of *Sang Sinchai* consists of three complete volumes: volume one (Add.12261), volume two (Add.12262/A), and volume four (Add.12264). Volumes three and five of the pentalogy are missing. The folded book is made of blackened *khòi* paper in landscape orientation. Volume one has 64 folios and is 360 mm by 150 mm; each page has eight lines of the Thai script written with yellow gamboge ink. Volume two has 45 folios, is 380 mm by 180 mm, and has ten lines per page of text in the Thai script. Volume four has 41 folios, 320 mm by 135 mm, with eight lines of the Thai script text on each page. The title on the first folio of volume one reads *Sang Sinchai samut nüng* (สังสินชัย สหมุด นึ่ง, original spelling). The covers of each volume are reinforced with several laminated paper layers. The manuscript has no illustrations.

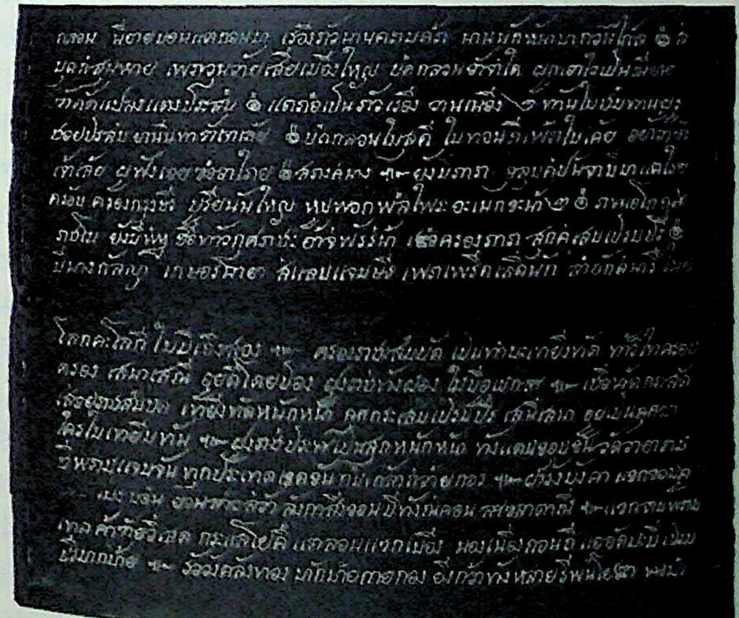

**Figure 3:** Folio two of volume one of the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* kept at the British Library (Add.12261).

Some parts of volume one are written in orange ink. This phenomenon occurs when using a fresh pot of ink, which appears brighter yellow after use. The text was written with a white steatite pencil and overwritten with ink. In some places, notes were added in the margins in Thai with white steatite pencil. The spelling differs slightly from modern standard Thai orthography; for example, the name มอญ (Mon) is spelled มอน. Tonal marks are inconsistent, with *mai tri* and *mai chattawa* completely absent.

## Provenance

The provenance of the manuscript is only partially known. It was brought to the British Museum in 1842 by Thomas Rodd, a London bookseller, as part of the Sir John Murray Collection. Murray (1745–1822) served in the British establishment in Bengal from 1770 to 1797 as auditor general and commissary general. His collection included several manuscripts from Burma, most importantly in the Arakanese form of the Burmese script bearing copying dates from 1721 to 1784. Although Murray never travelled to Burma, he had a connection through Dr. Francis Buchanan, who provided him with a 3,000-word *Account of Burma and Pegu and the steps necessary in case of a rupture* in 1796. Murray was an enthusiastic collector of manuscripts and is believed to have acquired the *Sang Sinchai* manuscript, together with more than 20 other Burmese and Thai manuscripts, from Buchanan. The manuscript was probably brought to the UK when Murray returned from Bengal in 1797.

Although included in a handwritten list of Oriental manuscripts under the title "*Sang Sin Chaih* (*Sankha Sinjaya*) or story of a Prince who owned a conch-shell and a bow, in Siamese," its existence remained largely unknown until the late 1950s or early 1960s. It was discovered by Thai scholar Khachòn Sukhaphanit while carrying out research on various Thai manuscripts at the British Museum. In 1973, the manuscript was transferred to the British Library when it absorbed the British Museum library.

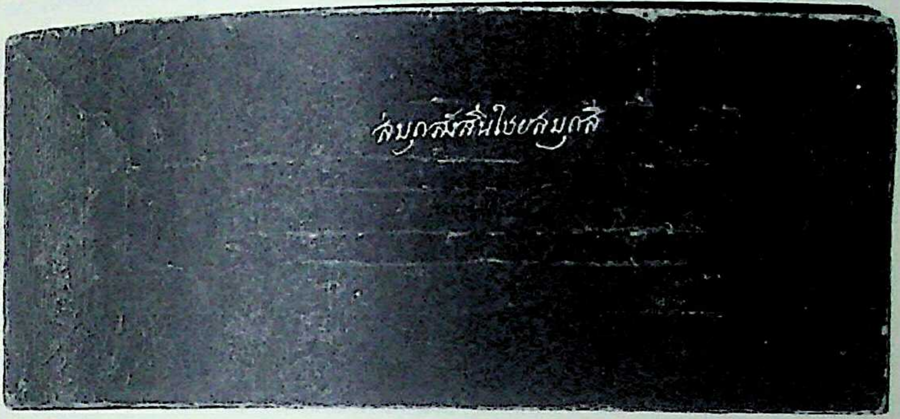

Figure 4: The front cover of volume four of the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* kept at the British Library (Add.12264).

## Synopsis

According to the introductory note running from the first folio to the second folio of volume one (Add.12261), the manuscript was created after the "siege of the Great City" (วุ่นวายเสียเมืองใหญ่). It was written from the scribe's memory, because the original text had been lost or destroyed. The term "siege of the Great City" is ambiguous: it could refer to the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. However, McCormick and Jenny (2011, slide 15) believe it refers to the destruction of the Mon city of Hamsavati in 1757. The name of the scribe is not mentioned. After paying homage to Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, and his teachers, the scribe expressed his wish to make a purposeful contribution to the spread of wisdom by writing down "this ancient Mon story" (นิยายมอนแตกอนมา, original spelling) in *klòn* verse.

The main characters in the story are King Senakut, his sister Kesòn Sumontha, her abductor Yak Kumphan, and their daughter (Srī) Suphan (Kanlaya). Other characters include Senakut's consort Pathuma (thewi), her son (Sang) Sinchai, and her attendant Kraisòn and her son Sing

(Harat). The names in brackets and six other consorts of King Senakut and their sons are mentioned only in passing.

King Senakut has a younger sister, Kesòn Sumontha, who is abducted by the ogre (*yakkha*) Yak Kumphan, who falls in love with her. The king searches for his sister without success. Kumphan and Kesòn Sumontha have a daughter, Si Suphan. However, the little daughter is lost to a *nāga* (serpent) in a bet between Kumphan and the *nāga*. In desperation, Senakut becomes an ascetic and settles in the forest, where he eventually meets seven beautiful maidens who he asks to become his consorts. After some time, six of them give birth to six sons. However, the seventh consort, Pathuma, and her attendant, Kraisòn, give birth to two very special sons: Pathuma's child, Sang Sinchai, is born in a conch shell along with an ivory bow; Kraisòn's son, Sing, is born in the shape of a mythical lion. *Saṅgkha* (สังข์) is Pāli for a conch shell, and *Singha* (สิงห์) means a lion. The final syllable of both words is silent in Thai.

Out of jealousy, the six other consorts bribe the court astrologer to make inauspicious predictions based on the abnormalities of Sang Sinchai and Sing. Senakut is convinced by the astrologer's prophecies and banishes the consort, her attendant, and their sons from the city. The god Indra (Sakka) creates a wonderful palace for the two women and their children. The two boys develop further supernatural abilities from growing up in the forest, supplementing their inborn merits and power.

When the six jealous consorts realize that Sinchai and Sing are still alive, they devise another wicked plan. They plot with their six lazy, useless sons to ask Sinchai for help hunting birds and fishing for their father, King Senakut. When they present their spoils to the king, they claim the credit for themselves, without acknowledging Sang Sinchai. Although the king praises the six brothers, their mothers are still dissatisfied. One of Senakut's consorts tells her son to ask Sinchai for help finding their aunt, Kesòn Sumontha, as the king still pines for his younger sister. The plan is that the six brothers will dispose of *Sang Sinchai* and Sing in the forest. Together they search for their aunt. They arrive at a river that formed the border to the kingdom of the ogres. The six vicious half-brothers are overcome with fear; only the brave Sinchai crosses the river to fight the ogres and their armies. Eventually Sang Sinchai releases Kesòn Sumontha. He also wins back her daughter, Si Suphan, from the *nāga* and brings them both back to the river where the others are waiting. The six half-brothers plot to kill Sinchai by forcing him into a waterhole and leaving him for dead. Kesòn Sumontha and her daughter, however, believe that Sang Sinchai is still alive and pray for him. The aunt leaves her scarf and a hairpiece at the spot, declaring that if these items are returned Sinchai is still alive. Kesòn Sumontha and Si Suphan return to the city with the six half-brothers. In the meantime, Indra saves Sinchai and brings him back to his mother in the forest palace.

A merchant brings Kesòn Sumontha's scarf and hairpiece back to Senakut's city. She shows the two items to her brother, King Senakut, as proof of the six half-brothers' betrayal and Sang Sinchai's survival, imploring the king to look for Sang Sinchai, Sing, and their mothers in the forest. Senakut fulfils his beloved sister's wishes, finally welcoming Sang Sinchai, Sing, Pathuma, and Kraisòn back to his city. Sang Sinchai marries Si Suphan and becomes the next king. Senakut orders the six half-brothers and their mothers to serve the new king as servants, but they are consumed with anger and jealousy. Finally, Senakut, Pathuma, and Kesòn Sumontha, got a tonsure and adopted the lives of ascetics.

## Style

The text of the manuscript is written in archaic language that differs somewhat from modern Thai. As mentioned, this is not the intellectual creation of a writer, but a recreation of a pre-existing text that was at risk of being lost. The rhyme scheme, which would have helped the scribe to memorize such a lengthy text, suggests that the story had beeen handed down orally. Oral traditions usually rely on easy-to-memorise rhyming patterns to ensure accurate and complete recital of a text. In the Thai tradition, narratives were composed and handed down in poetic form, as were laws and chronicles. This text is characterized by extensive graphic descriptions of places and characters and detailed portrayals of the characters' emotions.

The basic meter comprises stanzas of four verses, the first three consisting of pairs of four syllables and the fourth of four syllables only. In terms of rhyme scheme, the fourth syllable of the first verse rhymes with the eighth syllable of the first verse, and the fourth syllable of the second verse rhymes with the fourth and eighth syllables of the third verse. A typical sample and schema of this rhyme scheme is shown below (in the original spelling; volume four, folio three, seventh and eighth lines):

เมือนันหกเจา เหนนายสัมเภา
xxxA xxxA
เอาชองเทวี กับผาสใบย
xxxB xxxC
อยูในยคีรี มาถวายพันปี
xxxB xxxB
หมี๊ใดยสงไปย
xxxD

However, there are variations, with some stanzas extended beyond four verses. The basic pattern is similar to *klòn si* (four-syllable verse), although there are differences in the rhyming within the stanza. There is also a similar pattern in Mon and classical Burmese poetry (Jenny 2011, online version p. 130).

## *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha*, *Sang Sinchai* and *Sang Sinsai*

There is a general agreement that the motif of a boy being born in a conch shell is based on *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, which is one of the post-canonical birth tales in *Paññāsa Jātaka* collections. The Pāli term *Paññāsa Jātaka* means "50 birth tales." Several collections of *Paññāsa Jātaka* are known in northern Thai (Lan Na), Lao, Tai Lü, Tai Khün, Thai, Khmer, Burmese, and Mon traditions (Jaini 2002, 250 [footnotes]; Skilling 2006, 134–136), although the number of stories and their arrangements vary. Some stories that are part of the *Paññāsa Jātaka* are referred to in Burmese and northern Thai inscriptions, chronicles, and Buddhist texts dating back to the 13th and 14th centuries. However, there is no evidence of an original or standard collection.

Most of *Paññāsa Jātaka* are assumed to be composed by Buddhist monks (and possibly novices) in the kingdom of Lan Na between the 15th and 17th centuries in hybrid Pāli language and local Tai dialect. Some tales may have been added later, but the majority originated in the 15th century (Fickle 1978, 7–9). Wat Pa Daeng, Wat Phra Sing, Wat Mahabodhi in Chiang Mai, and Wat Phra That Haripunjaya in Lamphun were the main 15th and 16th century centres of Buddhist scholarship in Lan Na. However, many learned monks and novices fled to Luang Prabang before and during the Burmese conquest of Chiang Mai in 1558, or were taken to Burma. This migration contributed to the spread of *Paññāsa Jātaka*, and to the significant increase in manuscript production and enhancement of Buddhist scholarship in Luang Prabang during the 16th century (McDaniel 2005, 381). Collections of *Paññāsa Jātaka* are also known as *Chadok nòk nibat* and *Hasip chat* (Lan Na and Lao traditions) and *Zimmè pannātha* (Burmese tradition, *Zimmè* referring to Chiang Mai). The oldest extant manuscript containing one or several *Paññāsa Jātaka* is a version in the Lao and northern Thai Tham script dated 1589 (Jaini ibid.), although this may actually be a later predated copy. According to Jaini, this manuscript was in the collection of Christian

Velder; I personally investigated this collection around 2000 and found no extant manuscripts dated before the late 18th century. Most surviving manuscripts containing one or more *Paññāsa Jātaka* date back to the 18th and 19th centuries, but many of them may be copies of older manuscripts.

Motifs from *Paññāsa Jātaka* can be found on 9th century reliefs at the Borobudur monument in Java (Jaini 2002) and on an 11th century monument in Pagan (Fickle 1978, 8), which suggests that some *Paññāsa Jātaka* may have derived from older pre-Buddhist folklore. Skilling notes that some *Paññāsa Jātaka* have parallels with Sanskrit literature (2006, 162), and Fickle mentions similarities to canonical texts, as well as Tamil, Chinese, Tibetan, Khotanese, and local Southeast Asian folktales (Fickle 1978, 50–58). Velder offers the following speculation regarding the obvious parallels of *Paññāsa Jātaka* with local folklore:

> Monks from Chiang Mai collected folktales and incised them onto palm leaves; centuries before the Brothers Grimm on our shores travelled the countryside to collect folk tales from the people. The monks, however, were devout and faithful Buddhists . . . The age-old folktales that they wrote down became their teachings and sermons. Following the model of their Buddhist scriptures, they let the Buddha appear amidst his followers at the beginning and the end of these tales. The hero of each tale became a former incarnation of the Buddha . . . (Velder 1997, 455–456, translated from German by the author).

A set of northern Thai *Paññāsa Jātaka* transliterated from the Tham script into the modern Thai script was published in 1998 under the auspices of Chiang Mai University. The international team of researchers involved in this project point out that the original manuscript version written in the northern Thai Tham script is mainly in Lan Na dialect supplemented with Pāli words and phrases. The text is in prose and largely follows the structure of the *Jātaka* in the Pāli canon.

Pāli-language versions of *Paññāsa Jātaka* found in central Thai, Khmer, and Burmese traditions are assumed to be translations of *Paññāsa Jātaka* composed in the Lan Na dialect (Chiang Mai University 1998, [14] of the appended booklet). Several Thai manuscripts at the National Library of Thailand, the British Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and the Royal Library in Copenhagen are collections of *Paññāsa Jātaka* in the Khòm script, mainly or entirely in Pāli language. The first printed Thai translation was published between 1923 and 1929 under the supervision of Prince Damrong.

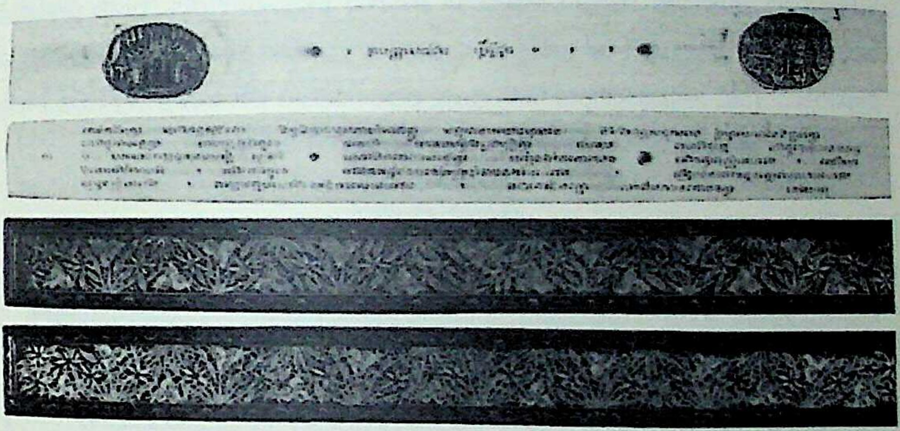

**Figure 5:** *Paññāsa Jātaka* on 235 folios of a palm-leaf manuscript in the Khòm (Khmer) script from central Thailand with black lacquered covers and gilt floral decoration (19th century). From top to bottom: the title leaf with the royal seal of King Rama IV, the first text leaf, and the wooden covers (British Library, Or 12524).

In the Lan Na tradition, *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* (Golden Conch Birth Story) is also known as *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha rājakumāra jātaka* (สุวัณณสังข์ราชกุมารชาดก; Wat Sung Men collection, Phrae) and as *Suvanna hòi sang* (สุวัณณะหอยสัง; Wat Si Bun Yün collection, Lamphun). There is no standard order or numbering for *Paññāsa Jātaka* collections: *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* appears as no. 6 in the Wat Sung Men collection and in a collection from Vientiane (Fickle 1978, 18); as no. 53 in a collection at the National Library of Thailand (ibid., 16); and as no. 41 in a Cambodian collection (ibid., 17). However, *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* can be found in manuscript form, independent of any particular *Paññāsa Jātaka* collection, such as in the example below. In the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts (DLLM), 69 manuscripts of *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* are available online. The oldest dated *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* manuscript in this digital collection was made in CS 1165 (1803) and is kept at Vat Sisuphon in Phonthong, Champasak Province. The second oldest, from BE 2368 (1825), is in Luang Prabang Provincial Museum. However, most manuscripts in Laos collections are undated and older examples may exist. The repository of Chiang Mai University Library (CMUL) Digital Heritage Collection lists two *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* manuscripts (both undated, but probably late 19th or early 20th century), and the Digital Library of Northern Thai Manuscripts lists only one (dated BE 2473 (1930)). Many more such manuscripts may exist but remain to be digitized.

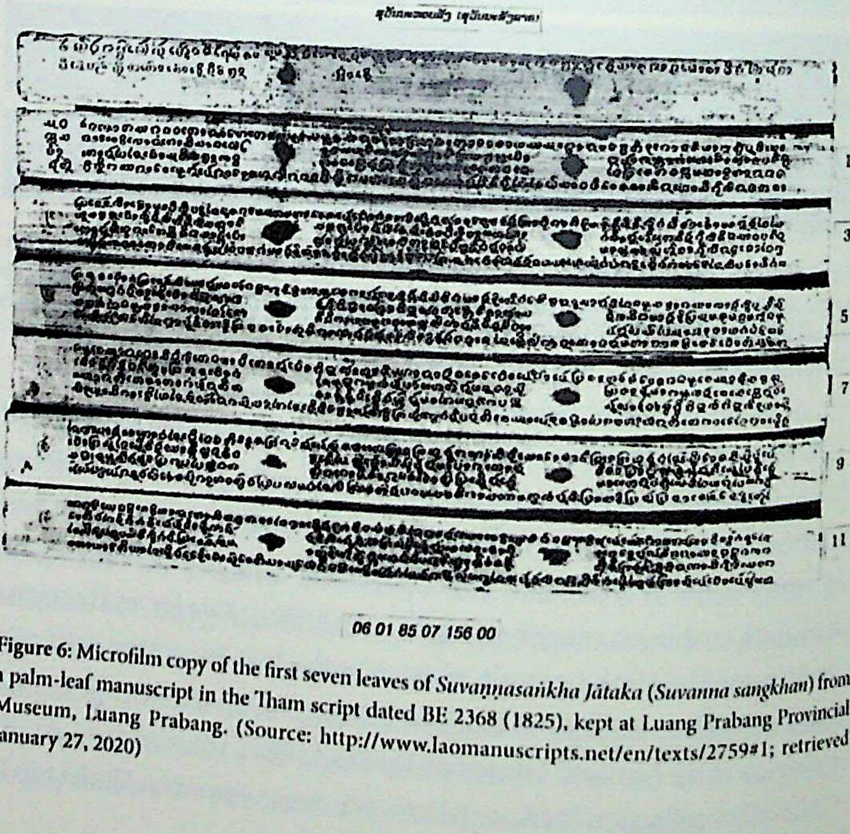

**Figure 6:** Microfilm copy of the first seven leaves of *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* (*Suvanna sangkhan*) from a palm-leaf manuscript in the Tham script dated BE 2368 (1825), kept at Luang Prabang Provincial Museum, Luang Prabang. (Source: http://www.laomanuscripts.net/en/texts/2759#1; retrieved January 27, 2020)

The content of *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* is summarised by Fickle based on translations by Drans (1947) and Velder (1966). However, both sources seem to have been translated from the Thai-language version of *Sangthòng*, the central Thai version of *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, and not from the original northern Thai *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*. Nonetheless, Fickle's summary corresponds, in general, to a translation from Thai by Baker and Pasuk (2017). It also corresponds to the content description of the *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha* manuscript shown in Figure 6 and to a translation of the story by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (2017):

> 53. *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*
>
> A queen, driven away by a jealous rival, finds refuge with an old couple. Six months later, she gives birth to a conch shell. At night a boy slips out of the shell and does all the work, and then returns to the shell. Finally the mother gets a glimpse of him, and she smashes his shell so that he cannot return to it. They are restored to the palace, but again the rival causes trouble, and the two are set adrift on a raft. They become separated. The boy is rescued by a *naga* king, who creates a golden boat in which he sails to the *yakkha* world, where he is raised by the *yakkhini*-ruler. When he grows up, he escapes by adopting the disguise of an aborigine/forest troll and flying off with the aid of magical shoes. He finds refuge with cowherds near the city of Baranasi. There the king is holding a *svayamvara* for his youngest daughter, and the aborigine succeeds in winning her. The angry king drives the couple off into the wilderness. His six brothers-in-law repeatedly plot how to kill the aborigine, but nothing succeeds because he has magic powers. Finally Sakka poses a riddle and it is the aborigine who is able to answer it. His true, handsome form is revealed and he becomes the ruler, both in his wife's kingdom and in his own (Fickle 1978, 298–299).

The main characters in the northern Thai (Lan Na) version of *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, according to the 2008 publication by Chiang Mai University, are King Phrayā Phrommathat, his wife Chanthathewi, and his minor consort (เมียน้อย) Ratthewi, who is a jealous rival of Chanthathewi. Suwannasang (sometimes called Suwannasang-ratchakuman) is the son of Phrommathat and Chanthathewi. Nang Thewi Yak is Suwannasang's *yakkha* foster mother. Nang Khantha is the youngest daughter of the king of Vārāṇasī (or Benares), Pharansi Maharat. She marries Suwannasang, and the husbands of her six sisters (Suwannasang's brothers-in-law) hate Suwannasang because of his disguise as an "aborigine" with dark skin and bushy hair. They believe he will bring shame to the family, so plot to kill him.

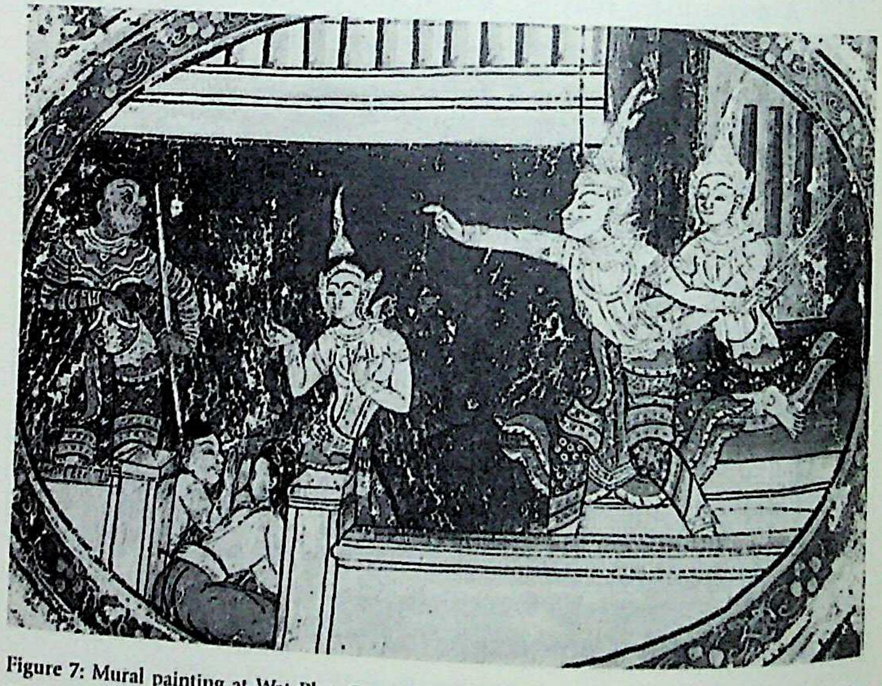

**Figure 7:** Mural painting at Wat Phra Sing, Chiang Mai, depicting a scene from *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*. King Phrommathat's daughter chooses Suwannasang, disguised as an 'aborigine,' for a husband. The king banishes the couple from the kingdom. The king's wife tries to deter him from making this awful decision. (Image source: http://ich.culture.go.th/index.php/th/ich/folk-literature/252-folk/79-2012-01-31-09-46-20; retrieved April 10, 2017)

Notwithstanding variations in the text in Lao language east and west of the Mekong River, the hero in Lao versions (the boy born in a conch shell in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* and in the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai*) is split into two characters: Sang Sinsai, a boy of normal human shape and superhuman skills born with a bow and arrow (in some versions a sword); and his twin brother Sangthòng, who was born with the body of a conch shell. Sangthòng is the Lao (and Thai) translation of the Pāli name Suvaṇṇasaṅkha. The twin brothers are the sons of King Kutsalat and his consort Nang Lun, one of the seven maidens he fell in love with while living as a hermit in the forest. Another half-brother is Siho, a boy with the body of a lion and head or trunk of an elephant. He is the son of King Kutsalat and Queen Nang Chantha. Sang Sinsai is the hero of the story, with Sangthòng and Siho in supporting roles. There are also significant differences in the storyline and rhyme scheme between the Ayutthaya text of *Sang Sinchai* and the Lao versions of *Sang Sinsai.*

The following table highlights the most significant similarities and differences between the main characters in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* in the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai*, and the Lao text of *Sang Sinsai.*

| ***Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*** | ***Sang Sinchai*** | ***Sang Sinsai*** | **Character description** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suwannasang | Sang (Sinchai) | Sangthòng | Hero born with a conch shell; main character in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* and Thai text |
| - | – | Sang Sinsai | Twin hero born with a bow and arrow; main character in Lao text |
| King Phraya Phrommathat of Müang Phrom(mathat) | King Senakut of Ulumkhapanjā | King Kutsalat of Pengchan | Father of the hero, or twin heroes in Lao text |
| Chanthathewi | Pathuma (thewi), one of the seven maidens | Nang Lun, one of the seven maidens | Queen and mother of the hero in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* and Thai text; minor consort and mother of twin heroes in Lao text |
| - | – | Nang Chantha | Queen and mother of Sihô in Lao text |
| - | Kesòn Sumontha | Nang Sumuntha | Sister of the king, aunt of the hero (twin heroes in Lao text) |
| Ratthewi | – | – | Minor consort of Phraya Phrommathat and rival of the queen |

| *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* | *Sang Sinchai* | *Sang Sinsai* | Character description |
|---|---|---|---|
| – | Seven maidens | Seven maidens | Six are minor consorts of the king and rivals of the seventh maiden (Pathuma (thewi) in Thai text, or Nang Lun in Lao text) |
| – | Kraisòn | – | Attendant of Pathuma (thewi) and mother of Sing (harat) |
| – | Sing (harat) | Siho | Son of Kraisòn in Thai text, son of queen Nang Chantha in Lao text; half-brother and supporter of the (twin) hero(es) |
| Phraya Nak | Nak, or Thao Nakha | Phanya Nak | *nāga* (serpent) |
| Nang Thewi Yak | – | Yakkhinī | *Yakkha* foster mother of the hero in Thai text; ogress in love with main character in Lao text |
| – | Yak Kumphan | Yak Kumphan | Male *yakkha*, abductor of king's sister |
| Pharanasi Maharat | – | – | King of Vārāṇasi, father-in-law of hero |
| Nang Khantha | – | Kiengkham | Daughter of Phārānasī Maharat in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*; wife of the hero in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* and of Sinsai in the Lao text east of Mekong River |
| – | Si Suphan | Sidachan | Cousin of the (twin) hero(es), daughter of Yak Kumphan and the king's sister; becomes wife of hero in Thai text |
| Six brothers-in-law | Six half-brothers | Six half-brothers | Attempted murderers of the (twin) hero(s) |

The storylines and characters of the Thai and Lao texts differ from *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* in various ways, although the motifs are based on this *Jātaka*. Some character and place names are different, but this was common practice in mainland Southeast Asian literary traditions when Buddhist stories and folktales were translated or retold in a different sociocultural context. For example, the Pāli name of the title and main character *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha* (Thai transliteration: Suwannasang) is Sang (Pāli-Thai for conch shell), *Sang Sinchai* (Pāli-Thai, very freely translated "conch shell artistic masterpiece") in Thai text, and *Sang Sinsai* in Lao text. The name of the father of the boy in the conch shell is Phrommathat (Pāli: Brahmadatta, the name of numerous kings of Vārāṇasī/Benares) in

*Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, Senakut in Thai text, and Kutsalat in Lao text. His wife Chantha-thewi is Pathuma (thewi) in Thai text and Nang Chantha in Lao text (*Nang* and *thewi* being titles). The name of the father's kingdom is Müang Phrom (mathat) in the *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka;* in Thai text it bears the Sanskrit-sounding name Ulumkhapancha (อุลุมขปัญจาล์; Sanskrit: Ulumpañjāla), and Pengchan in Lao text. Pengchan could be an abbreviated form of Ulumkhapancha, emphasizing the second part of the name. Alternatively, it could be a derivation of Bañcāladanī, which is another kingdom or city mentioned in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*.

Some characters in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* appear as different characters in Thai and Lao texts, but retain the same functions. Characters absent in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* play important roles in Thai and Lao texts. For example, the king has a sister who plays a significant role at the beginning of the Thai and Lao texts and later when the hero is being lured into a trap. The minor consort of the hero's father in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, Ratthewi, does not appear in Thai and Lao texts. In these texts, the seven maidens become the father's consorts; six are rivals of the hero and his mother.

In *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, Nang Khantha is one of seven daughters of the King of Vārāṇasī, who later marries the hero. In *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, it is the husbands of the six sisters (or maidens), or six brothers-in-law of the hero, who are the rivals. However, in Thai and Lao texts these six rivals are the hero's half-brothers. The *yakkha* (giant) character in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* is female. She develops a maternal love for Suvaṇṇasaṅkha; but in the Thai text the *yakkha*, Kumphan, is male and falls in love with the king's sister, Kesòn Sumontha. In the Lao text, there are two main *yakkha*, one male (Kumphan) who falls in love with the king's sister, and one female, who falls in love with the hero (Sinsai). The king of Vārāṇasī, Pharansi Maharat, and his daughter Nang Khantha do not appear in Thai and Lao texts, although they play significant roles in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* as the father-in-law and the wife of the hero. Instead, the hero marries his cousin, Si Suphan, in the Thai text. The names of the serpent (Phraya Nak, Thao Nakha and Phanya Nak; *phraya/phanya* and *thao* being titles) are similar in all three tales, although the serpent takes different roles. In *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* and in the Lao text, the serpent directly supports the hero, whereas in the Thai text he is more neutral, indirectly helping the hero to win his wife and the support of his aunt, Kesòn Sumontha. Two active supporters of the hero do not appear in *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, but feature in the Thai text: Kraisòn, the attendant of the hero's mother and her son, Sing(harat). Similar to the hero, Sing(harat) assumes the form of a lion, and he is like a brother to the hero. In the Lao text, the two most significant supporters of the hero Sinsai are his twin brother, Sangthòng, and his half-brother, Siho.

The increased number of characters in the Thai and Lao texts helps to create more episodes, scenes, conflicts, and plot twists. The result is a longer, more intricate and more complex storyline. *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* is straightforward, mainly telling the hero's story. In Thai and Lao texts, the hero's story is embedded in the story of the king, who loses his sister to the *yakkha* until finally they are reunited through the exploits of the hero.

## Discussion

Udom Rungruangsri estimated that there are about 130 versions of *Vessantara Jātaka* alone by various scribes (Udom 1997, 126–127). This simple statement highlights a common feature of many literary works in the Thai and Lao cultural context, including *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, *Sang Sinchai*, and *Sang Sinsai*. It was common practice to memorize, retell, translate, and back-translate folklore and Buddhist tales, while adding, deleting, and substituting characters and story elements, and changing names and rhyme schemes. It is near impossible to establish the *Urversion* (original source version). Thai texts of *Sang Sinchai* and Lao texts of *Sang*

*Sinsai* share their main motifs with *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*. The Lao versions frequently reference *Paññāsa Jātaka* (Lao: ຫ້າສິບຊາດ *hasip sat*); another feature of the *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka* motif, the boy born in a conch shell, has parallels with numerous legends and myths in other cultural contexts.

The motif of a boy emerging from a conch shell is evident in Tibetan, Bengal, and Sri Lankan folklore traditions (Ingersoll 1973, 22–23). Watcharaphòn Ditthapān dedicated a whole book chapter (2003, 13–36) to the conch shell motif in different cultural contexts. She listed the titles of folktales containing the conch shell motif in central and southern Thai, northern Thai (Lan Na), northeast Thai and Lao, Shan, Tai Lü, Tai Khün, Tai Phuan, Tai Nüa, and Tai Phake folklore traditions. McCormick and Jenny investigated the conch shell motif in the Mon tradition and concluded that the legend of Prince Sangada could be a Mon re-telling of the Thai story of *Sang Sinchai* (McCormick and Jenny 2011; Jenny 2011, 216–218). Although some names of characters in *Sangada* differ from *Sang Sinchai*, Jenny's content summary indicates that *Sangada* is practically identical to the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* in the British Library manuscript and the 1969 Thai publication of *Sang Sinchai* (Jenny 2011, 117–118). Jenny emphasizes the opening stanzas of the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai*, which cite an ancient Mon legend. This is a stark contrast to the Lao text of *Sang Sinsai*, which references *Paññāsa Jātaka*. Jenny's research reveals:

> . . . the special syntactic features found in *Sangada* cannot be attributed to foreign (Burmese or Thai) influence, as is the case in other Mon texts, but should be seen as indigenous poetic register (ibid, 128).

The versification of the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* and the Mon text of *Sangada* differ, following the rhyme schemes of the Thai and Mon languages, respectively. Jenny concludes:

> It is not easy, perhaps impossible, to tell who borrowed from whom. Probably the story goes back to an old folktale that has been variously adapted by different traditions at different times. As the Mon people almost certainly were an important part of the population of Central Thailand during much of the Ayutthaya period, it is very probable that much of the traditions shared by Thai and Mon were developed in a common environment. The Lao being culturally and linguistically very close to the Thai, common developments are ubiquitous not only in the field of literature. Multilingualism was probably much more widespread in precolonial times than it is today, and the societies were much more multiracial. In this social context the transmission of folktales from one people to another can occur much more easily than in today's centralized nation-states with fixed political (and cultural) borders (ibid., 133).

Oral tradition is central to understanding the dissemination of a literary motif over a wider geographical area. Many literary works have been carried by the spoken word — over weeks, months, or even years — from one place to another before they were finally written down. Text amendments, additions, and deletions are only natural under such circumstances. Buddhist monks and novices collected and wrote down folktales, even translated them into Pāli and various other languages. However, performing traditions also take much credit for the spread of literary motifs. Monks travelled back and forth between centres of Buddhist worship, education, and art. In addition, royals with their entourages of artists, singers, theatre troupes, craftsmen, and other followers helped to publicize folkloristic heritage in foreign lands. Even after texts had been written down, the manuscripts did not necessarily stay in one place. Akiko Iijima notes that manuscripts were circulated by monks and villagers across regions; no connection can be assumed between the origin and content of a manuscript and its final location:

> . . . one must rather try to trace the history of the manuscripts' journeys in conjunction with the human movement, whether it be a small company's trip or large-scale migration (Iijima 2002, cited in McDaniel 2005, 387).

In this context, the British Library *Sang Sinchai* manuscript is unusual as its provenance has been well documented since the end of the 18th century. Although the scribe remains anonymous — common practice until the 19th century — he (assuming it was a man) explains his intentions and gives hints about the manuscript's production environment. The scribe was clearly conscious of the Mon connection of *Sang Sinchai.* Jenny suggests that the scribe may have been a Mon refugee who fled to Ayutthaya during the Burmese capture of Hamsavati in 1757 (McCormick and Jenny, 2011, slide 15). However, there is no logical reason why a Mon scribe or author would translate and recreate a Mon legend in Thai versification and take the manuscript to Burma, where hardly anybody could read and understand it. The scribe stated that the original text was lost or destroyed and that his intention was to preserve the text from memory (Folio 2, volume 1 of the British Library manuscript). The scribe gives no indication that he translated the original Mon text into Thai. It seems more likely that the scribe was a Thai scholarly monk or learned person — with a great memory — who was aware of the Mon story of *Sangada*. This is compatible with the longstanding cohabitation of Mon and Thai communities in the Ayutthaya kingdom. The manuscript was found in Burma, so the scribe was possibly a prisoner-of-war or displaced person who, like thousands of other Ayutthayan people including their former short-term ordained king Uthumphòn, were forcibly taken to Ava following the sack of Ayutthaya (Damrong 2001, 356).

Despite all these clues, the authorship of the Thai (Ayutthaya) text of *Sang Sinchai* and the name of the scribe remain unclear; nor do Lao text versions of *Sang Sinsai* provide any information about the Thai text.

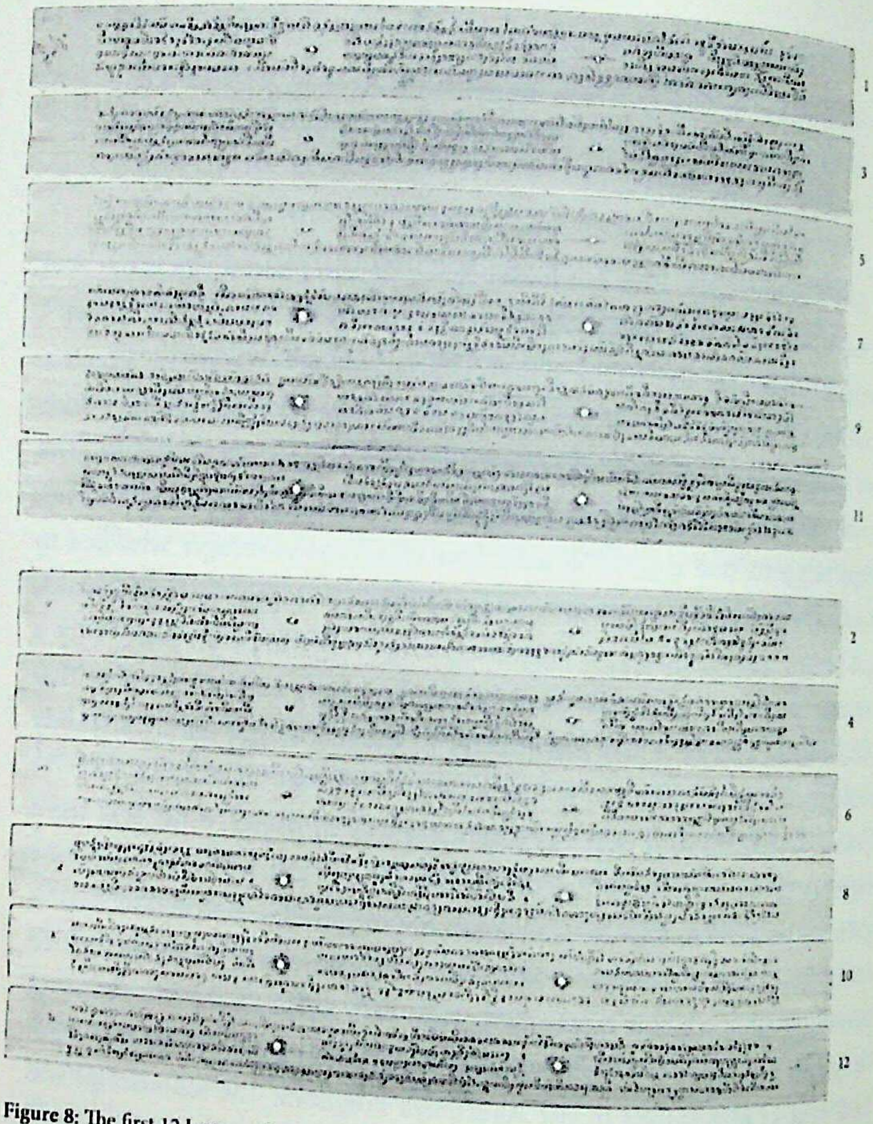
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**Figure 8:** The first 12 leaves, sides A and B, of an undated Lao version of *Sang Sinsai* in a palm-leaf manuscript kept at the National Library of Laos; the name Pangkham is mentioned in line 4 of folio 1, below the hole on the left. (Source: Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts http://www.laomanuscripts.net/en/texts/12221#1; retrieved January 27, 2020)

The Lao text in Figure 8 was transliterated from the Lao Buhan script into modern Lao by Viravong. The introductory stanzas suggest either a versified translation from Pāli or a transliteration from the Tham script of *Paññāsa Jātaka* (Lao: ຫ້າສິບຊາຕ). (It is unclear how to interpret the term ແປທັມ in this context; ທັມ can refer to the Tham script and to Buddhist scriptures in Pāli language.) The reference to *Paññāsa Jātaka* appears almost routinely in 19th century Lao palm-leaf manuscripts that include *Sang Sinsai*. In addition, Pangkham is mentioned in several 19th century Lao and Lao Isan manuscripts as the "Tai" translator (ປາງຄຳ ... ໃດຈັກຕຶກແຕ່ງຕັ້ງແປປັ່ມເປັນໄທ, spelling as per the original manuscript; see also *Nangsü Sang Sinsai* 1969, 1). The majority of Lao manuscripts do not contain any names. Viravong points out in his introduction to *Sang Sinsai* (*Sang Sinsai* 1949, 7) that Chao Pangkham is mentioned in the annals of Champassak (ພົງສາວະດານເມືອງຈຳປາສັກ) as a royal or nobleman of Müang Nòngbualamphu in the year BE 2184 (1641). He also explains that Pangkham is a literal translation of Prasat Thòng, who was king of Ayutthaya from 1629 to 1656.

The physical condition of the British Library's *Sang Sinchai* manuscript gives some hints about the circumstances of its creation. It comprises at least five volumes; the three volumes at the British Library are of different shapes and sizes. This is contrary to Thai manuscript tradition. Volumes making up one coherent text or a collection of connected texts would usually have the same appearance and size. The physical condition of the folded books indicates rather heavy use, whereas the yellow-ink text appears fresh. This is a contradiction. The scribe may have acquired blank folding-books en route to Burma or after settling there, and subsequently written down the text of *Sang Sinchai*. The scribe of the *Sang Sinchai* manuscript may have intended to preserve the story for future generations at this particular Thai settlement in Burma.

Uthumphòn passed away in 1796. It may be sheer coincidence that Buchanan acquired the British Library manuscript in Burma that year. Could one of Uthumphòn's monastic followers have been the scribe of this manuscript? At least two volumes of this manuscript are missing, which may have been destroyed in conflict with the Burmese. The surviving volumes may have been given to a British colonial officer for safekeeping in an attempt to preserve the remaining parts of the manuscript.

Answers may lie in the correspondence between Murray and Buchanan and in Buchanan's report (British Library, IOR/H/388). Other clues may be hidden in another Thai manuscript containing a Buddhist text entitled *Manusya-vinaya* (Thai: *Manut-winai*) that is in Murray's collection (British Library Add.12263). This manuscript, commissioned by a married couple, was written by the same scribe with the same ink, in a black paper folded book of similar shape to the *Sang Sinchai* manuscript. The scribe mentions that he had to recreate the text from memory as the original text was lost a long time ago. As with the British Library manuscript, it may have been handed to a British officer to protect it from destruction and to preserve it for future generations.

Further research into the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* needs to consider the lively cultural exchange throughout mainland Southeast Asia that spurred the spread of the conch shell motif. However, it is also important to treat *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*, the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai*, and the Lao text of *Sang Sinsai* as literary works in their own right. Although they share the main motif and some elements and names within the story, they are not simply different versions or retellings. For clarity, the titles of the Lao and Lao Isan texts of *Sang Sinsai* should not be transliterated into *Sang Sinchai* in Thai research works and in publications on Lao texts. In the past, this mistake has encouraged the belief that the Thai text of *Sang Sinchai* is an adaptation or translation of the Lao text, which is not the case.

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# An Investigation of *Bot Lakhòn Nòk* Manuscripts: A Case Study of *Phra Rot-Meri*[1]

**SUTHEERA SATAYAPHAN**

## Introduction

*Bot Lakhòn Nòk* means "plays performed outside the royal court." *Lakhòn Nòk* performance is a genre of Thai performance literature involving folk dance-drama that developed in the central part of Thailand in the 17th century or earlier (Mojdara Rutnin 2013, 11). *Phra Rot-Meri* is a *Lakhòn Nòk* play based on a story popular among the Thai, Lao, and even the Tai Lü of *Sipsòng Panna*. The characteristics of *Lakhòn Nòk* are simplicity, wit, and humor. The actors and actresses exaggerate their expressions, feelings, and emotions.

Thai scholars have carried out extensive research into drama and performance literature. Prince Damrong, a pioneer in researching and compiling this genre, explained in *Tamnan Lakhòn Inao* (The History of *Inao* dance-drama; Damrong Rachanuphap 1955, 8) that Thai dramas can be divided into three categories: *Lakhòn Chatri*, *Lakhòn Nòk*, and *Lakhòn Nai*. Of these, *Lakhòn Chatri* is probably the oldest and the prototype for all Thai traditional dance-drama. This short, simple form was the predecessor to *Lakhòn Nòk*. The most popular *Lakhòn Chatri* plays were *Phra Rotthasen* and *Nang Manora*. These were performed differently, largely because the protagonist of *Phra Rotthasen* was male, and the protagonist of *Nang Manora* was female. Accordingly, theatres with actors who excelled at male parts would perform *Phra Rotthasen*, and theatres with actors who excelled at playing female parts would perform *Nang Manora*.

*Nang Manora* was the more frequently performed of these two *Lakhòn Chatri* plays. *Lakhòn Chatri*, also called *Norachatri*, developed to *Lakhòn Nòk* through the introduction of exaggerated techniques and the inclusion of musical instruments and songs (Saowalak 1972, 9).

The storylines of *Bot Lakhòn Nòk* come from any tales except *Ramakian*, *Unarut*, and *Inao*, which are plays for court entertainment (*Khon* and *Lakhòn Nai*). Most *Lakhòn Nòk* plays are adapted from *Jātaka* stories, particularly from *Paññāsa Jātaka*, such as *Sangthòng*, which derive from *Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka*. Stories performed in *Lakhòn Nòk* distinctively emphasize melodramatic and comic scenes.

*Phra Rot-Meri* is a popular *Lakhòn Nòk* play with its roots in such folktales and legends as *Nang Sipsòng* in Thailand and *Rathasena Jātaka* in Lan Na or northern Thailand. The story of *Phra Rot-Meri* was connected to the royal ceremonies of Ayutthaya. It appeared with Thai traditional lyrics as *Kap Khap Mai Rüang Phra Rot*. The story also featured in other literary genres, such as *Kap Khap Mai*, *Phra Rot Nirat*, and *Bot Lakhòn Nòk Phra Rot-Meri*. The precise era of the play's origin is unclear, because some *Phra Rot-Meri* manuscripts were categorized as Ayutthaya plays, while others were categorized as Bangkok plays. This chapter investigates 12 *Bot Lakhòn Nòk Phra Rot-Meri* manuscripts that have been preserved in the National Library of Thailand to determine their age. It also showcases unpublished manuscripts to aid further literature studies and enhance the writing culture of Thai manuscripts.

## *Phra Rot-Meri* in Thai literature

*Phra Rot-Meri* has been widespread in mainland Southeast Asia since ancient times in verbal and written forms, featuring such tales and local legends as *Nang Sipsòng*, *Rotthasen*, *Buddhasen*, *Nang Kangri*, and *Nang Sunnatra*. The verbal tradition favors local legends: *Müang Phra Rot* in Chonburi, Chachoengsao, and Prachinburi provinces; *Khao Ok Meri* (Meri's breast hill) in Phang Nga province, and *Khao Meri* in Luang Prabang in Lao. The story of *Phra Rot-Meri* was also told through lullabies and Nora performances in southern Thailand. In written form, *Rathasena Jātaka* was first included in *Paññāsa Jātaka* (1457–1657), an anthology of northern Thai literature compiled from folktales by a northern Thai monk. Moreover, *Klong Nirat Haripuñjaya*, which was composed in 1637, has a verse referring to the characters Phra Rot and Nang Meri:

กังรีนีราศร้าง        รถเสน
หวานหว่านในดินเดน        ด่านน้ำ
นางยักษ์ผูกพันเวร        มรโมด วันนัน
อันพี่พลัดน้องซ้ำ        เร่งร้าย ระเหระหน

Kangri, or Meri, parted from Rotthasen.
(She scattered her magic powder returning to a river)
The ogress, Meri, mourned and died on that day.
(As) being away from you, I am so sorrowful.

(Fine Arts Department, 1987: 172)

In this verse, the *Nirat Haripuñjaya* poet compares his sadness parting from his lover with Phra Rot leaving Nang Meri. It shows that the story of *Phra Rot-Meri* was known in northern Thailand during the 17th century, as supported by references in other literature.

In addition to *Klong Nirat Haripuñjaya*, literature used in royal ceremonies included *Kap Khap Mai Rüang Phra Rot* (กาพย์ขับไม้เรื่องพระรถ), and traditional Thai lyrics mention the motif of 12 banished ladies, which is a motif from the *Phra Rot-Meri* storyline. Such poems were sung from Ayutthaya period to the Bangkok period. Considering the literary style, Prince Damrong Rachanuphap assumed that these lyrics were written during the Ayutthaya period. However, *Kap Khap Mai Rüang Phra Rot* was never included in books of historical literature, even though it was first published in 1912.[2] The story of Phra Rot is mentioned in the Thai textbook, *Cindamani*, by Phra Horadhibodi, which is believed to have been written during the reign of King Narai (1656–1688) during the Ayutthaya period. It includes verses that scholars suspect to be excerpts from *Nang Sipsòng* or *Phra Rot-Meri*, given as examples of a type of verse known as *Surangkhana Padumachan* (สุรางคณาปทุมฉันท์).

๏ โอ้อกกูเอ่ย   เมื่อก่อนกูเคย   สมบัติครามครัน
ทำบุญบ่เบื่อ   เชื่อชอบทุกอัน   จึงได้จอมขวัญ   ลูกน้อยนงพาล
๏ ถึงบุญเราถอย   สิ่งสินยับย่อย   ยากพ้นประมาณ
บาปใดมาให้   พ่อเจ้าบันดาล   กำจัดสงสาร   สิบสองเสียไกล ฯ

Oh! I once had plenty of treasures, never felt bored with making merit. I thus had children.
Until the fruits of merit decreased, my treasures were lost.
What kind of sin arouse the father to banish the poor 12 girls.

**(*Cindamani*, 1959: 53)**

Boontuean Srivorapot, who examined *Phra Rot Kham Chan* (2005, 2), supposes the verse กำจัดสงสาร สิบสองเสียไกล (banishing the 12 poor sisters) was taken from lost manuscripts of *Phra Rot-Meri* because it does not appear in any other extant manuscript.

Surviving manuscripts of *Phra Rot-Meri* entitled *Phra Rot Kham Chan*, were examined and published by the Fine Arts Department in 2005. The introduction suggests that, considering the literary style, *Phra Rot Kham Chan* was written in the late Ayutthaya period during the reigns of King Narai (1656–1688) and King Phetracha (1688–1703). Moreover, *Phra Rot-Meri* manuscripts in the Manuscripts and Inscriptions group at the National Library of Thailand are believed to be written before the reign of Rama II; some can be traced as far back as the late Ayutthaya period.

## Background to *Phra Rot-Meri* folk dramas

With regard to scripts and songs used in *Lakhòn Nòk* folk dance-drama, Prince Damrong (1955, 9–10) suggests that Ayutthaya plays are similar to *Lakhòn Chatri*, which resemble folk poetry. Originally, the characters would improvise the poems, but later when *Lakhòn Nòk* became more popular, performing companies hired poets to embellish the scripts by making them more fun and exotic. Prior to that, the poems were similar to folk poems or songs (*Phleng Patipak*), lacking prosody and using simple rhymes of words ending /a/, /i/ and /ai/ (Saowalak 1972, 178). The embellished scripts developed into *Klòn Paet* (กลอนแปด), or octameter poems, with clear rhythms and rhymes. These characteristics formed the model for plays in later eras.

The aforementioned characteristics of *Bot Lakhòn Nòk* can be found in Ayutthaya plays, including *Manora* and *Sangthòng*. Several extant manuscripts attest to plays of *Phra Rot-Meri*. Some of these were written during the Bangkok period, others might predate it.

## Synopsis

Extant plays entitled *Phra Rot-Meri* are non-consecutive scripts. They are excerpted as episodes, depending on the performing troupe.

*Phra Rot-Meri* is the story of Phra Rot or Rotthasen, the hero, and Meri, an ogress. The story begins with a rich couple who pray for a child. The wife becomes pregnant and gives birth to 12 daughters, who the couple name Buathong, Buakaeo, Chongkon, Ubon, Buaphan, Buaphüan, Komut, Sribongkot, Buakhom (or Buachom), Bualuang, Pratumthong, and Phao. Unfortunately, the couple lose all their money and have to abandon their daughters in the forest to meet their fate. They are found by Santra (Sunnatra in some manuscripts), queen of the realm of ogres. The ogress takes pity on the girls and decides to raise them.

One day when they are grown, the 12 women learn the truth — that Santra is an ogress. They flee the realm of ogres and wander until they arrive at the kingdom of King Rotthasit. There, all 12 ladies marry the king, but their happiness does not last long. Nang Santra, the ogress, angered by their escape tracks the women down. She puts King Rotthasit under a spell. King Rotthasit is allured by the ogress Santra. Later, she pretends to be ill and claims that the eyes of the 12 women are only medicine to cure her disease. Consequently, King Rotthasit issue the order to gouge the 12 women's eyes out and banishes them to a cave.

After that the eyeless 12 women turn out to be pregnant and give birth to 12 babies, but all die, except for the son of the youngest sister, Phao. She names him *Rotthasen* or Phra Rot. Phao hides him and raises him secretly until he grows into a handsome young man who provides for the 12 sisters. When news of this reaches King Rotthasit and Nang Santra, the king invites Phra Rot to his palace. Nang Santra, furious to find out that the 12 sisters are still alive, feigns sickness, claiming that only the Bengal currants growing in her realm can cure her. She tells the king to send Phra Rot to find the fruit. Meanwhile, Nang Santra writes a letter to her adoptive daughter Meri, instructing her to kill the bearer of this letter.

However, Phra Rot meets a hermit on his way to the realm of ogres. The hermit gives him a flying horse and alters the message to instruct Meri to marry the man who delivers the letter instead. When Phra Rot arrives at the realm of ogres and gives the letter to Meri, she is delighted to see him, and they fall in love. They marry and settle down to live together.

One day, Phra Rot thinks of his mother and aunts. He plans to find the Bengal currants and to go back to his hometown. Phra Rot asks Meri to take a walk in the garden and asks about the names of the trees growing there. Meri does not realize that this is a trick, so tells him about the

Bengal currants, which can cure the eyes of the 12 blind women. Once Phra Rot knows about the tree, he plies Meri and the other ogresses with liquor and then flees to Rotthasit's palace on horseback with Santra's Bengal currents while they are drunk and asleep.

Meri wakes up and cannot see her husband anywhere. Suddenly, she realizes that Phra Rot has escaped. She pursues him to a river, where Phra Rot casts a magic powder into the water to turn the river into a mountain and a deep lake. Phra Rot wants to return to Meri, but his horse refuses, thinking of Meri as a shameless woman in pursuit of a man. For a while, Meri mourns Phra Rot's disappearance, but then realizing that he has gone for good, she tells the others to return to the realm of ogres. She suffocates on a hilltop, but Phra Rot rides on, not knowing she is dead. Finally, when he reaches Rotthasit's kingdom, he restores the sight of the 12 sisters.

Meanwhile, Khun Kaeo and Khun Krai find Phra Rot in the cave where the 12 sisters are imprisoned and tell him that Phra Rotthasit, his father, would like to see him. Phra Rot goes to see him and presents the Bengal currents. His father reprimands him for his years of absence. Phra Rot blames Santra. She is furious and transforms into an ogress who attacks them. The hermit instructs a little monkey to bring Phra Rot a ring that can kill the ogress. After Santra dies, Phra Rotthasit reinstalls the 12 sisters as his wives.

King Rotthasit and his 12 wives live on happily. Phra Rot goes back to Meri, but arrives too late because Meri has already died. Some versions of *Phra Rot-Meri* end here. However, in some manuscripts the story continues after Meri's death: Phra Rot meets a girl named Dasanari with her ladies-in-waiting at the river. He sends her flowers by floating them along the stream. Dasanari picks up the flowers and dispatches her chaperone, Woradasi, to find the sender. The chaperone finds Phra Rot and tells him to go to Dasanari's room at night. Finally, Dasanari becomes his wife, but they never leave her room. Woradasi asks the cook to prepare more food, claiming that Dasanari has had a nightmare and would like to offer food to the gods. The cook notices that all the food disappears every day. He asks Woradasi about this and, not daring to lie, she reveals that there is a man staying with Dasanari. The story in extant play manuscripts ends here.

## Manuscripts of *Bot Lakhòn Nòk Phra Rot-Meri*

The Fine Arts Department edited and published collected folk dramas about *Phra Rot-Meri* in 2009 in a book entitled *Prachum Rüang Phra Rot* (ประชุมเรื่องพระรถ; A Compilation of Phra Rot). Only seven manuscripts were amended (manuscript numbers 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10). There was very little information available about the manuscripts, and document age could not be determined. However, the Fine Arts Department editions preserved the text of some of the surviving manuscripts that were severely damaged; otherwise the text of this play would have been lost.

The research described in this chapter re-examines all 12 *Phra Rot-Meri* manuscripts, 10 of which are in *Samut Thai* and 2 in Western notebooks. *Samut Thai* manuscript nos. 2, 4, and 5 and Western notebooks no. 1 and no. 2 have never been published. The examination was carried out using Documentary Edition (also known as Diplomatic Edition), which is based on a diplomatic transcript that reports the text of a document as accurately as possible (Kelemen 2009, 569). Research results shed light on the history of *Bot Lakhòn Nòk Phra Rot-Meri*, which in turn helps to determine document age and support future studies of this text.

## 1. Manuscript no. 1

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 1
**Physical description:** White chalk on black *khòi* paper, 68 pages
**Provenance:** Presented to Vajirañāna Library on August 7, 1908, by Phrakhru Khantayakhom (Im) of Thepsirin Temple

The front cover of the manuscript presents a paratext list of clients and rates, presumably the rates of payment for dance troupes. Some lines include the name and the date, such as "Mrs. Auan on the 12th day of the waxing moon."

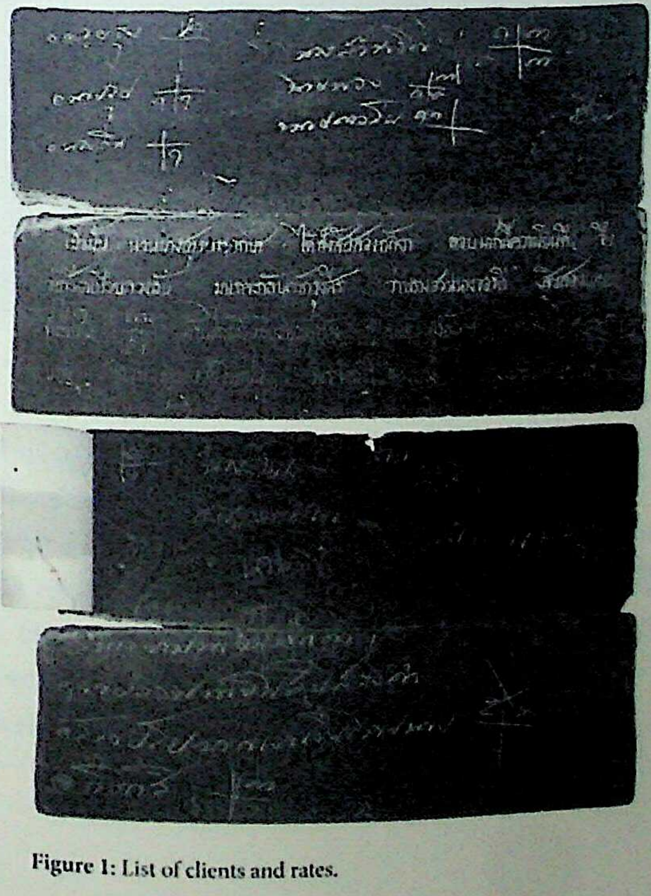


Figure 1: List of clients and rates.

This is followed by descriptions of the characters, starting with a rich man, Promchan, leaving Nang Sipsòng in the woods where the ogress, Santra, governess of Thantawan, later finds her. The ogress raises Nang Sipsòng, until she dreams that she was burned to death. The intriguing recto of the manuscript, which follows the list of clients and rates (Figure 2), describes the middle of the episode in which Nang Suntra (originally Nang Santra) happily adopts Nang Sipsòng. The beginning of the episode is related at the end of the manuscript verso.

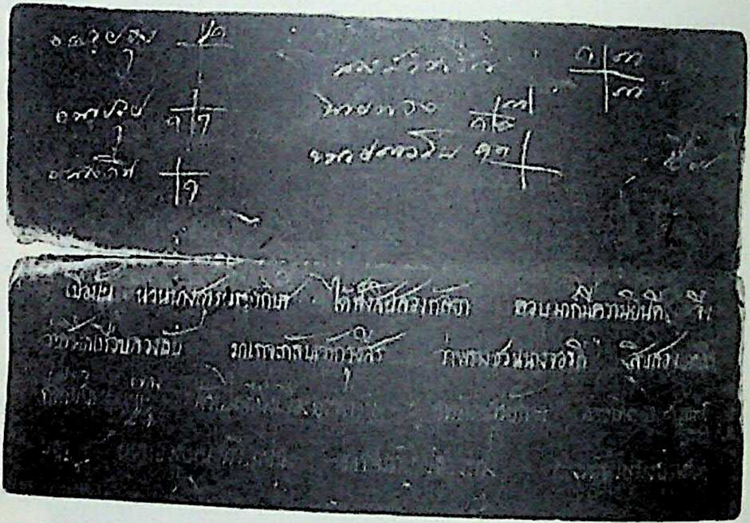


Figure 2: The text starts in the middle of the episode.

**Transliteration:** ๏ เมื่อนั้น นวนนางสุนทรายักษา
ได้ฟังสิบสองกัลยา ตอบมาก็มีความยินดี
จึงว่าสุรียาเกือบล่วงลับ มาเราจะกลับเข้ากรุงศรี
ว่าพลางชวนนางจรลี สิบสองมารศรีก็ตามมา
ฯ: ๔ คำ เจรจา

**Translation:** At that time, The Ogress, Suntra
Hearing the 12 girls reply her. Then, she is glad.
Saying that the sun is falling. We shall go back to the realm.
Then, the 12 girls follows the ogress to her realm.

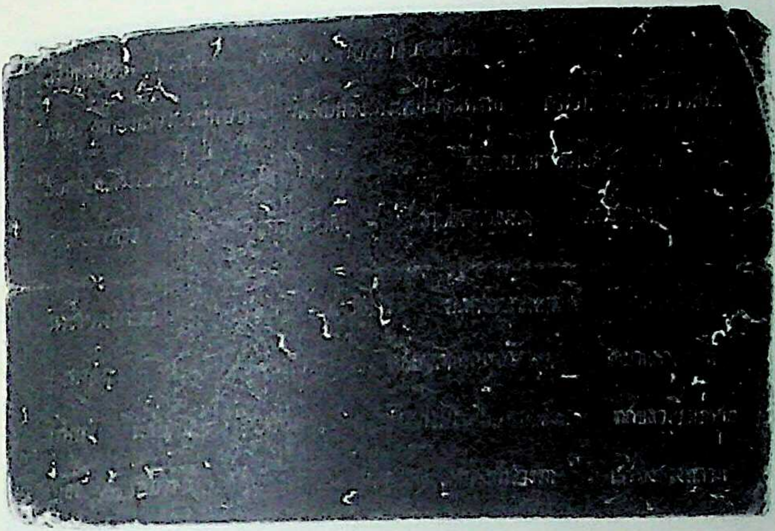


**Figure 3:** *Phra Rot-Meri* begins in the middle of the manuscript.

**Transliteration:** จัดแจงแต่งการเหมือนกล่าวมา    ปรีดาชื่นชมด้วยสมฝัน
กล่อมเกลี้ยงเลี้ยงลูกผูกพัน    ทั้งสิบสองนางนั้นไม่อันตราย
เจริญใจใหญ่กล้าขึ้นทุกที    สิบสองกุมารีงามเฉิดฉาย
วรภักจิ้มลิ้มพริมพราย    จึ่งตั้งนามโฉมฉายสิบสองคน

**Translation:** The rich couple are delightful.
They takes care of their 12 children.
The 12 children grow up and become 12 beautiful girls.

There appears to be a mistake in the compiling and labelling process that led to the recto and verso of the manuscript being reversed. Moreover, while 38 poems are listed in this episode, only 28 can be found. There may have been additional poems at the beginning of the episode that were lost due to manuscript damage.

Manuscript no.1 features faint letters written in white chalk, which deteriorates easily. The handwriting is meticulous, with upright, well-organized characters. The appearance of the lettering suggests the Bangkok period. However, the list of clients in the paratext is untidy and probably written in a different hand.

## 2. Manuscript no. 2

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri*
**Physical description:** White chalk on black *khòi* paper, 28 pages
**Provenance:** Presented to Vajirañāna Library by Mrs. Thongyu Chanyakul (นางทองอยู่ จรรยากุล) on April 13, 1925.

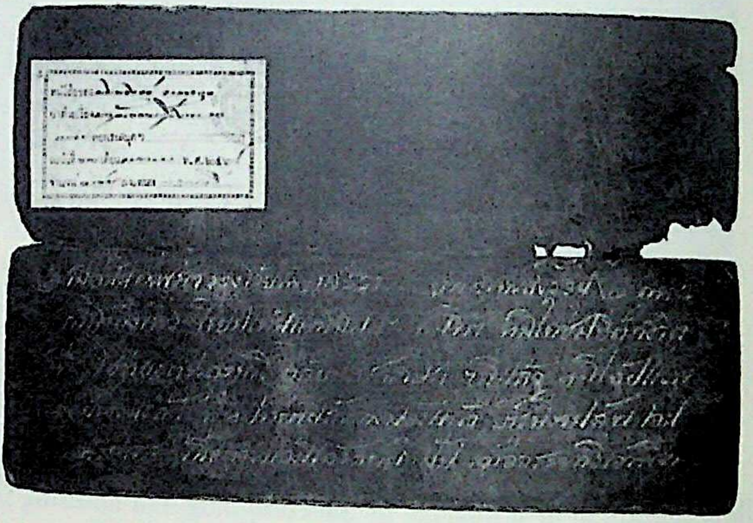


**Figure 4: Manuscript no.2. At the beginning of the episode, Phra Rot arrives at Dasanari's castle.**

Manuscript no. 2 has never been transliterated. The passage starts with Phra Rot arriving in Müang Khamput, also known as Sangkat. Phra Rot approaches Nang Worathasi, Nang Dasanari's governess, and convinces her to take him to her charge's bedchamber. The passage ends there, suggesting that transcription was incomplete.

Manuscript no.2 is written in a hand that suggests writing during the reign of King Rama III (1824–1851) (Figure 5).

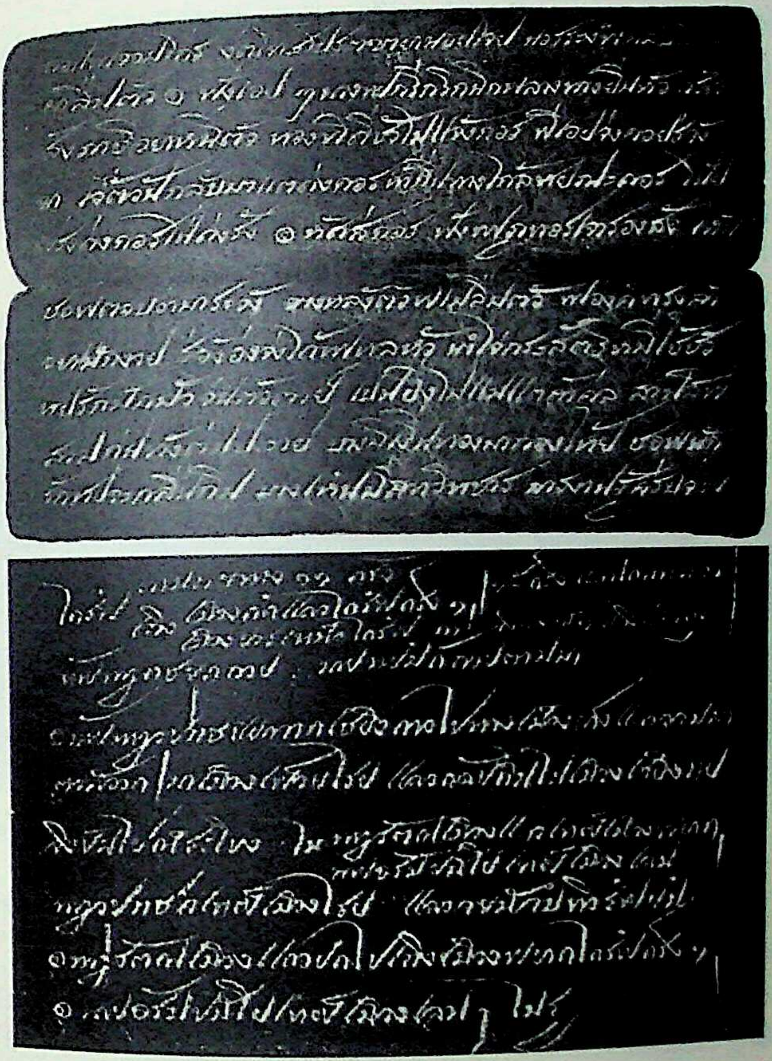


**Figure 5:** Manuscript no.2 (left) compared with a manuscript during the reign of King Rama III (right).

At the end of the document there is a list of names, wages, and performance dates, from Sunday, the seventh day of the waning moon in the ninth lunar month, to Saturday, the sixth day of the waxing moon in the tenth lunar month. Unfortunately, no year was recorded, so the exact date cannot be identified. "The ninth lunar month, Sunday, the seventh day of the waning moon, performed near Bon Taphan Hok (Taphan Hok gambling den)" in the paratext at the end enables a rough estimate of the era. Taphan Hok or Saphan Hok (Hok Bridge) was built at the end of Rama IV's reign (1851–1868), so this manuscript must have been written around that time. It has been used in performances since Rama V's reign (1868–1890).

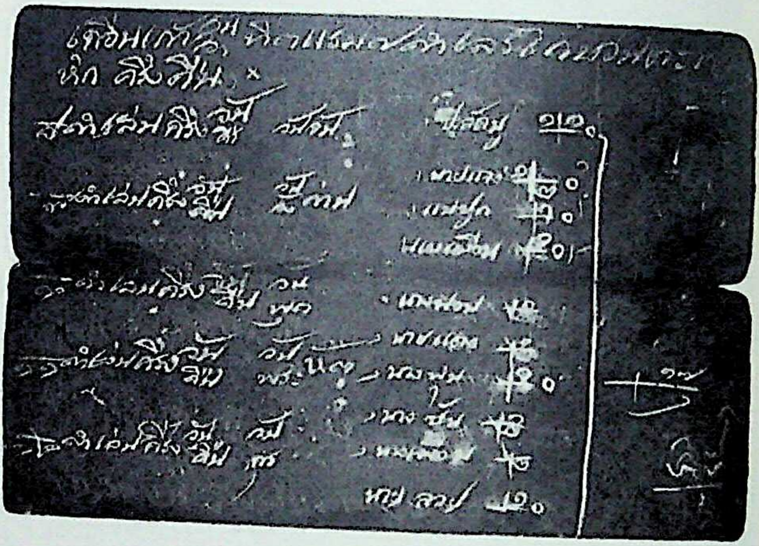


Figure 6: Manuscript no. 2, showing a list of clients, wages, and performance dates.

## 3. Manuscript no. 3

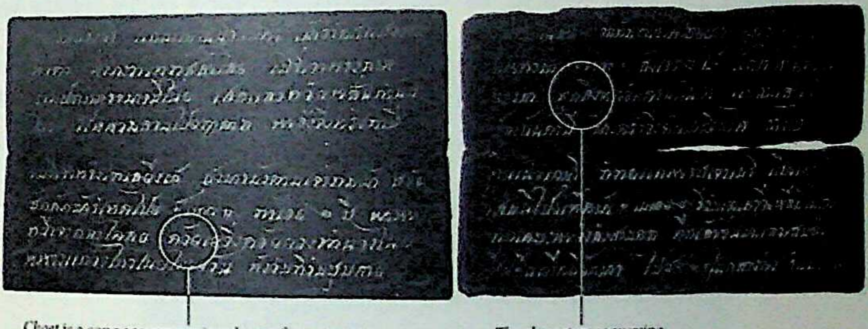
Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri*  
**Physical description:** White chalk on black *khòi* paper, 93 pages  
**Provenance:** Original copy at the Vajirañāna Library

Manuscript no. 3 is believed to be a *Bot Lakhòn Nòk* written in the Ayutthaya era that Phraya Pariyattithammathada (Phae Talalak) gave to Prince Damrong. It was copied from a manuscript found in Phetchaburi that was published for Songkran festival under the title *Bot Lakhòn Chao*

*Nòk* (an outsider's drama plays; Fine Arts Department 2009, 87). The original manuscript of *Bot Lakhòn Chao Nòk* has never been found.

The text starts with Phra Rot and Nang Meri visiting a garden. Phra Rot asks Nang Meri about the plants, which include Bengal currants. He collects the currants as medicine for the eyes. The episode closes with Phra Rot fleeing the town on a horse. It is possible that the original manuscript was damaged and the ending was lost. The document does not include a list of clients and actors' wages. However, the scribe recorded the names of songs used in parts of the performance (*Phleng Na Phat* or action tunes).



*Choet* is a song accompanying the performance or *Phleng Na Phat* (literally 'action tunes').

The characters conversing (Improvisation)

**Figure 7:** Manuscript no. 3, preserved in the Manuscripts and Inscriptions group of the National Library of Thailand.

There is evidence that Manuscript no. 3 was copied during the Bangkok period, but the exact date is unknown. The characteristics of the script are consistent with those of the reigns of Rama IV and Rama V. Prince Damrong observed that the literary style predates Rama II's reign, but was not certain if it is compatible with the reign of Rama I, the Thonburi period, or the late Ayutthaya period (Damrong 1955).

## 4. Manuscript no. 4

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri*
**Physical description:** Yellow scribal handwriting on black *khòi* paper, 62 pages
**Provenance:** Original copy at the Vajirañāna Library

The text starts with Sitthikan, Meri's officer, pursuing Phra Rot, who has fled from Nang Meri. Phra Rot casts a magical powder into the river, turning the water to acid, to stop Sitthikan. Nang Meri orders her henchmen to return home and pursues Phra Rot alone.

This manuscript has an unclear history, with no date of transmission. There are two poems at the end of the recto. The first is a *Krathu* poem, and the second a *Konlabot Nok Nam Fung*, (กลบทนกนำฝูง), which literally means "bird leading the flock."

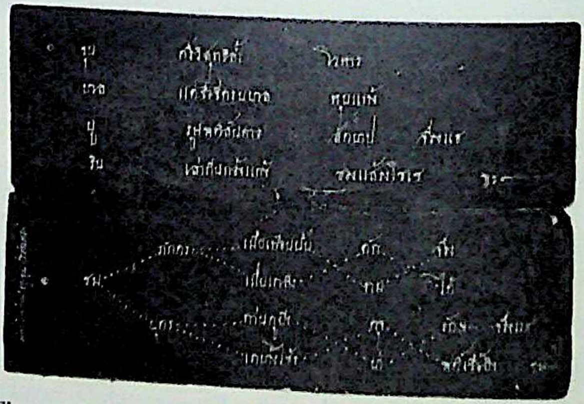


**Figure 8:** *Konlabot Nok Nam Fung*, at the end of the recto
**Transliteration:** ชมภักตรเมียเพื่อนนั้น งามจริง
ชมภักตรเมียเราลิง ดั้กได้
ชมบุตรท่านดูยิ่งน่ารักษ จริงแฮ
ชมบุตรเราบ้างไซร้ ดุจชาติ เชื้อลิง
**Translation:** Looking at the face of my friend's wife, so beautiful.
Looking at my wife's face like a monkey.
Looking at your son, how adorable,
Looking at my son, like a born monkey.

There is no explanation of who Khun Banburin is. However, *Konlabot Nok Nam Fung* was included in a book called *Pathom Mala* (ปฐมมาลา) by *Phrathep Moli* (*Phüng*) of Ratchaburana Temple. It was composed during Rama III's reign and was inscribed at Chetupon Temple, which was also built during Rama III's reign (Niyada 2001, 571–573). This suggests that the manuscript was written in the Bangkok period and does not predate Rama III's reign. However, the characteristics of the lettering implies it was written during the reign of Rama V.

Moreover, accompanying songs or action tunes (*Phleng Na Phat*) were inserted in parts of the manuscript; they were probably not originally part of the play, but to be used in later performances.

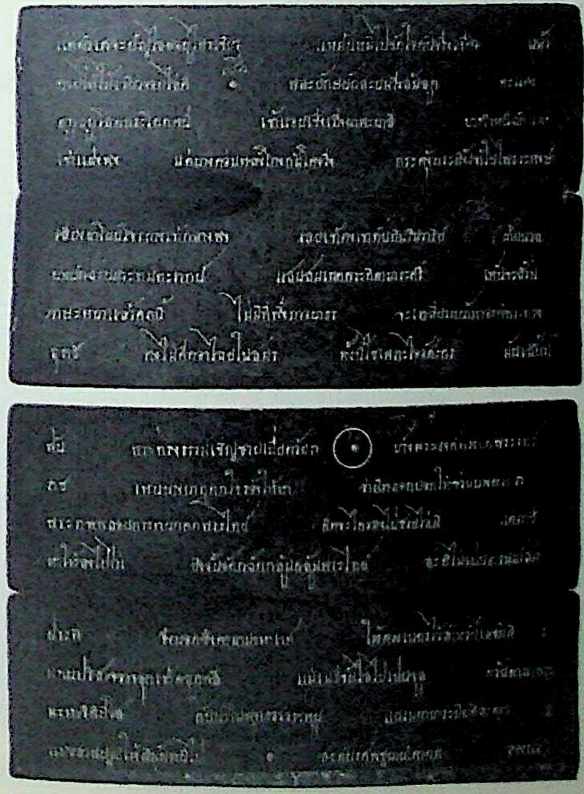


**Figure 9**: The scribe of Manuscript no. 4 added Phleng Na Phat (เพลงหน้าพาทย์) *Choet*, literally "fast action" (above), and *Ot*, literally "crying action" (below).

## 5. Manuscript no. 5

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri;* episode: Phra Rot offering Bengal currants
**Physical Description:** Black pencil (graphite) on white *khòi* paper, 93 pages
**Provenance:** Original copy at the Vajirañāna Library

The history of this manuscript has never been investigated. The message on the recto reads: "Saturday, the first day of the waxing moon, the eleventh lunar month, the year of the monkey." This is equivalent to September 20, 1884, Bangkok era 127, the year of the monkey, the tenth year of the decade (during Rama V's reign), suggesting that this manuscript was copied in 1884.

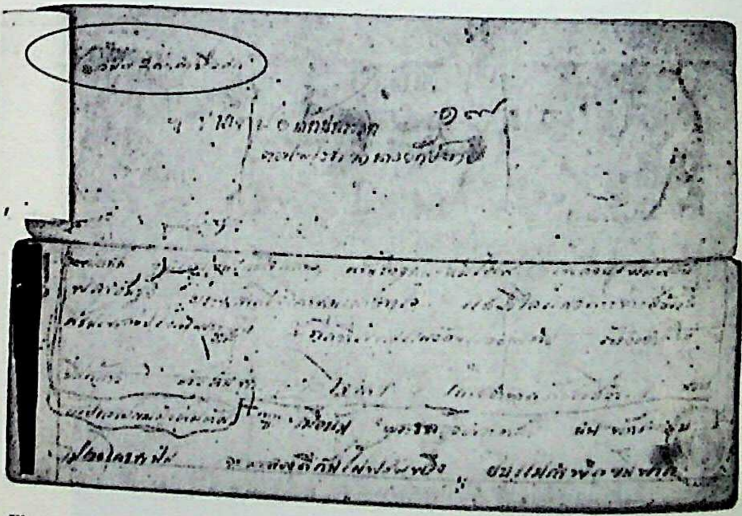


Figure 10: The date of Manuscript no. 5

The text starts with Indra coming down to help Phra Rotthasen and Nang Sipsòng by curing their eyes with an elixir. Phra Rotthasit dispatches an officer to summon Phra Rot, who fights and kills the ogress, Sunthara (or Santra, Sunnatra). Phra Rot asks a hermit to exorcize a demon that has possessed Phra Rotthasit. Once Phra Rotthasit regains consciousness, he is charged to accompany *Nang Sipsòng* back to the palace. The content of this manuscript is the same as Western book manuscripts no. 1 and no. 2, suggesting that Manuscript no. 5 was their common source.

Examination reveals that the end of *Samut Thai* (Manuscripts no. 5, pp. 76–93) contains the text that forms the beginning of the plays. The text continues to page 3. The text in this manuscript is similar to Western notebook no. 1. Moreover, five styles of handwriting are found in Manuscript no.5, some neatly written and well organized and others untidy, suggesting the work of several scribes.

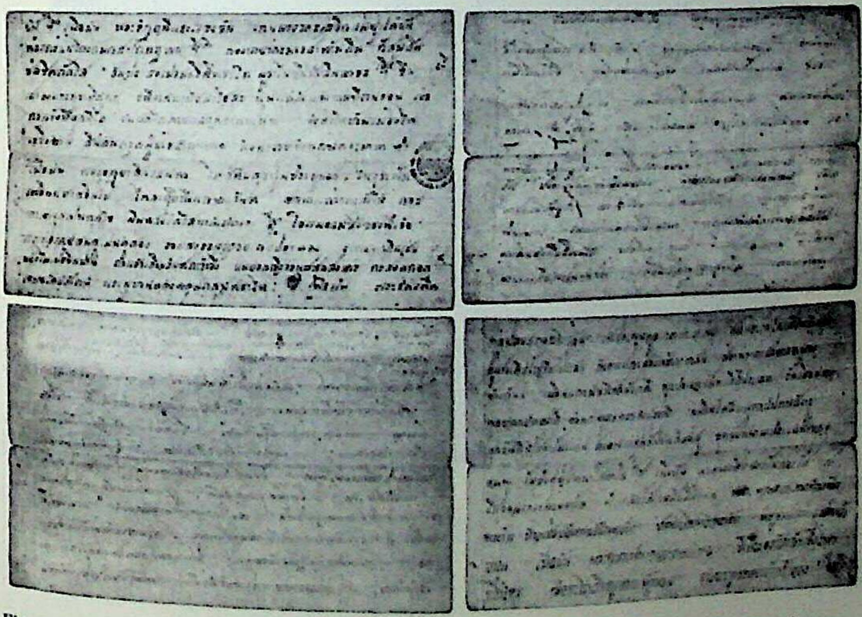


Figure 11: Manuscript no. 5; pp. 76–77, 4–5, 16–17 and 50–51, in different handwriting styles.

## 6. Manuscript no. 6

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri;* episode: Phra Rot battling Nang Santra
**Physical Description:** White chalk on black *khòi* paper, 115 pages
**Provenance:** Original copy at the Vajirañāna Library

The manuscript does not have a paratext dating the writing or copy. However, the last page of the recto, which is damaged, displays the handwritten number "2400." As there is no supporting passage to suggest this is a Buddhist date, it cannot be concluded that this is the year of transmission.

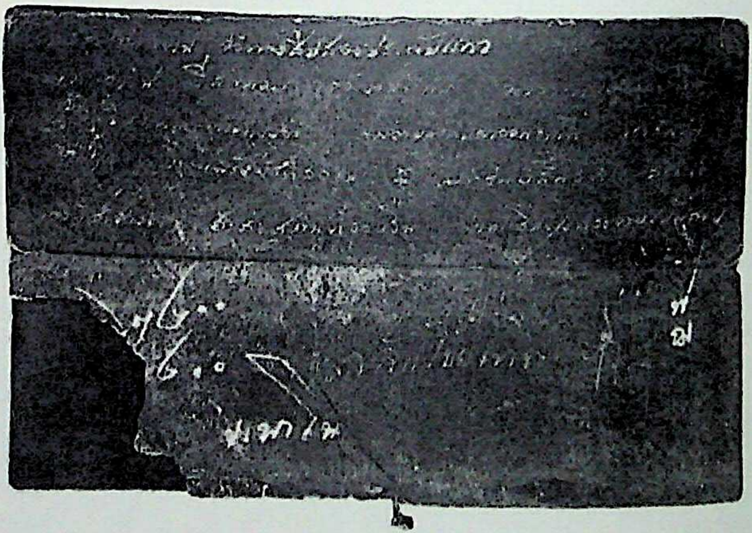


Figure 12: Number on the last page of the recto of Manuscript no. 6.

Manuscript no. 6 was written in white chalk; the faint letters are difficult to read and transliterate. Parts are copied in different handwriting, suggesting that some verses were lost and filled in later to complete the story.

The verse starts with Phra Rot battling the ogress, Santra. After he has killed the ogress, Phra Rot returns to Nang Meri, who dies of sorrow. He holds a funeral for Nang Meri, then travels to meet a hermit, who guides him to Nang Dasanari in Sangkat. The storyline differs from other versions of *Phra Rot;* in one version (Manuscript no. 9) Nang Meri dies immediately after Phra Rot's flight — her body turns to stone, enshrined in a pillared hall (*Mandapa*).

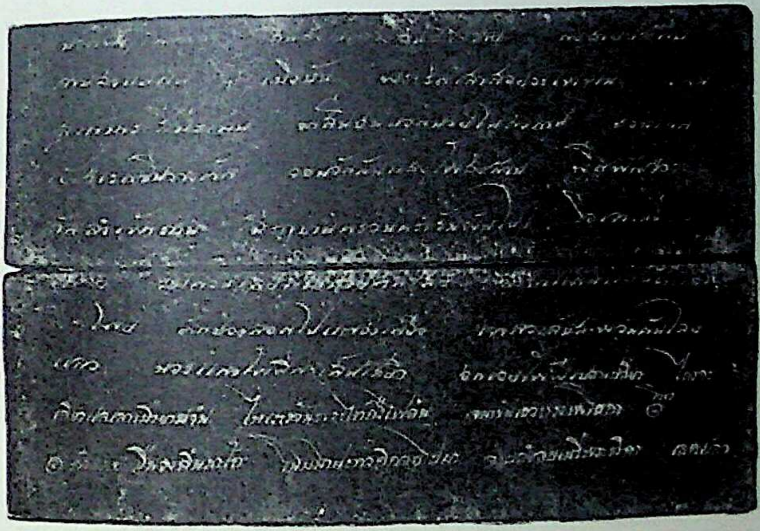


**Figure 13:** Manuscript no. 6, p. 93. The various handwriting styles suggest more than one or two scribes. (Episode portraying Phra Rot's grief over Nang Meri's death. He faints, and once he revives, he prays for a golden urn to house Nang Meri's body.)

Manuscript no. 6 features a different poetic style from the other manuscripts. The prosody of some poems differs from most plays, while some poems are similar to folk songs.

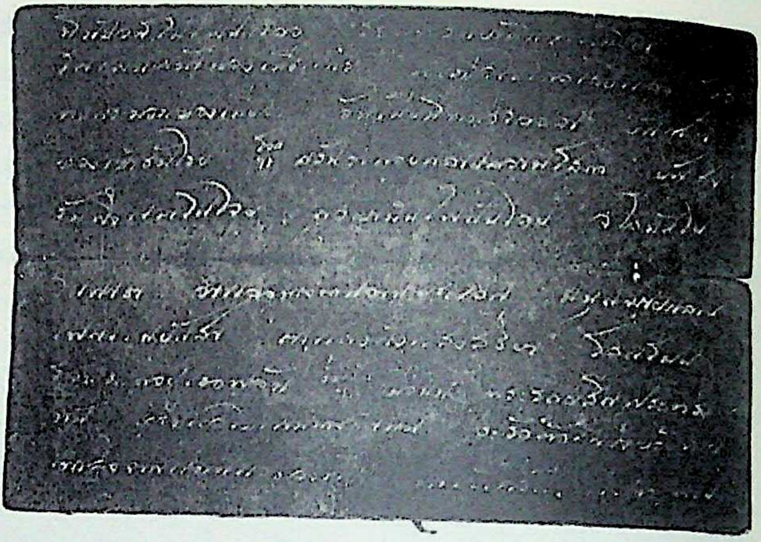


**Figure 14:** Manuscript no. 6, p. 9. The last three sentences are in a different verse style.

**Transliteration:** ๏ เมื่อนั้น          พระรทยสิทธิ์ผู้ทรงธรรม์
เหลือบแลไปเห็นนางยักษ์นั้น          ระรัวตัวสั่นเพียงขวัญหาย
ก้าวลงจากแท่นแก้วแล้ววิ่งหนี          ตกเข้า...หนีเพียงตัวตาย ฯ

**Translation:** Then, Phra Rotthasit, a virtuous king
Seeing the ogress, he is startled.
He steps off the throne and runs away.

## 7. Manuscript no. 7

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri;* episode: From Phra Rot fleeing Nang Meri to Phra Rot offering Bengal currants

**Physical Description:** Scribal handwriting in white chalk on black *khòi* paper, 111 pages

**Provenance:** Donated by Phraya Phetpani on March 12, 1907 (Bangkok era 126)

Manuscript no. 7 was given to the National Library by Phraya Phetpani, who scholars believe to be Phraya Phetpani (Tri), the owner of the Likay Hall (ลิเก) in front of Ratchanatda Temple. Research indicates that 27 other *Lakhòn Nòk* play manuscripts were given to the National Library by Phraya Phetpani. Some are clearly labeled with the name "Tri." However, the family name of Phraya Phetpani (Tri) remains unknown.

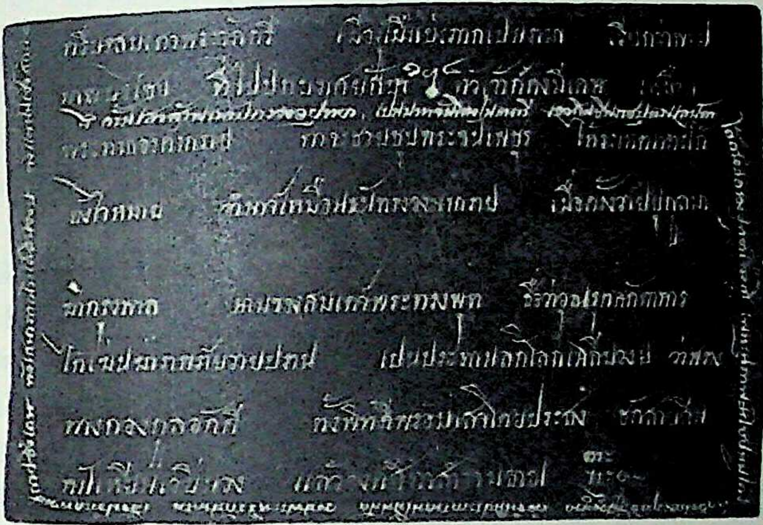


Figure 15: Manuscript no. 7, pp. 70–71. A verse inserted in the text.

The text begins with Phra Rot fleeing Nang Meri, who dies of sorrow. She is reborn on the *Dusit* level of Heaven, while her body turns to stone. The story ends with Phra Rot restoring Nang Sipsòng's eyes and offering Bengal currants to Phra Rotthasit. This manuscript does not include a colophon or other paratext recording the date of writing. Moreover, two different styles of handwriting are used: an organized hand that records the play from start to finish, and an untidy one used for text inserts, especially on the verso where 16 verses have been added.

## 8. Manuscript no. 8

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 9; episode: Phra Rot copulating with Dasanari
**Physical Description:** White chalk on black *khòi* paper, 100 pages
**Provenance:** Original copy at Vajirañāna Library

The handwriting is the same as Manuscript no. 8 and Manuscript no. 6 and the stories are linked. The text starts with Phra Rot hiding in Nang Dasanari's bedchamber and ends with Worathasi reporting the incident to Nang Dasanari's father. The final section of the manuscript specifies the performance date but not the year, so the age of this document is undetermined. Moreover, the scribe responsible for text insertions added a list of expenses and names, suggesting that manuscripts no. 6 and no. 8 were used for *Lakhòn Nòk* plays.

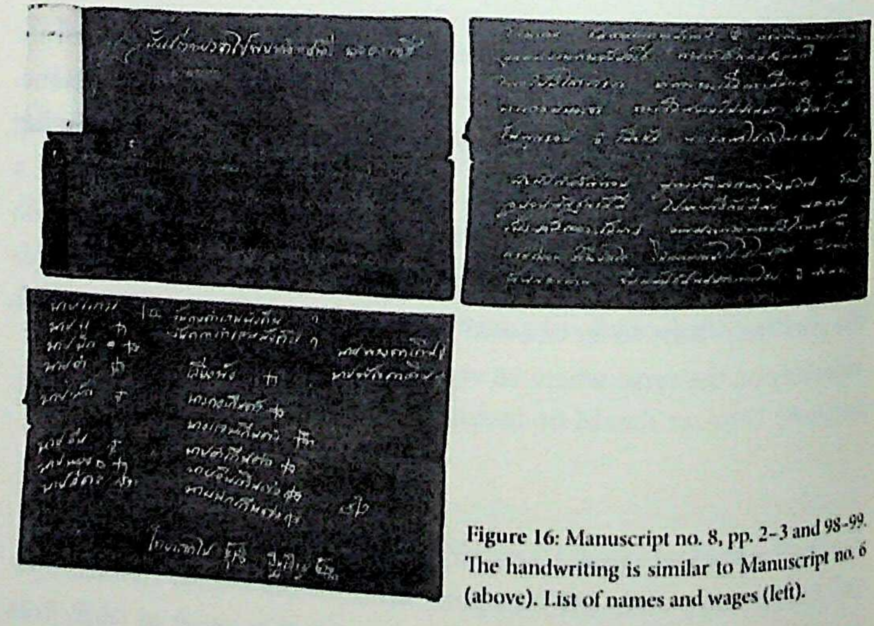


Figure 16: Manuscript no. 8, pp. 2–3 and 98–99. The handwriting is similar to Manuscript no. 6 (above). List of names and wages (left).

## 9. Manuscript no. 9

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

Title: *Phra Rot-Meri*, Volume 10

Physical Description: Scribal handwriting in white chalk on black *khòi* paper, 102 pages

Provenance: Donated to the library by Phraya Phetpani on March 12 in Bangkok era 126 (1907).

The handwriting in Manuscript no. 9 is similar to the handwriting in Manuscript no. 7. The recto bears the summary: ๏ หนังสือเรื่องพระรศ ตั้งแต่ พระรศกลับไปหา ภบสพนาง จนท้าวประทุมราชรับลูกกรรษัตรเข้าเมืองใหทิดาเลือกคู่ เล่ม ๑๐ ฯ (The story of Phra Rot, from Phra Rot returning to Meri and seeing her dead body to Thao Pradumarat inviting the prince to enter the town). It is the same format as the recto of Manuscript no.7.

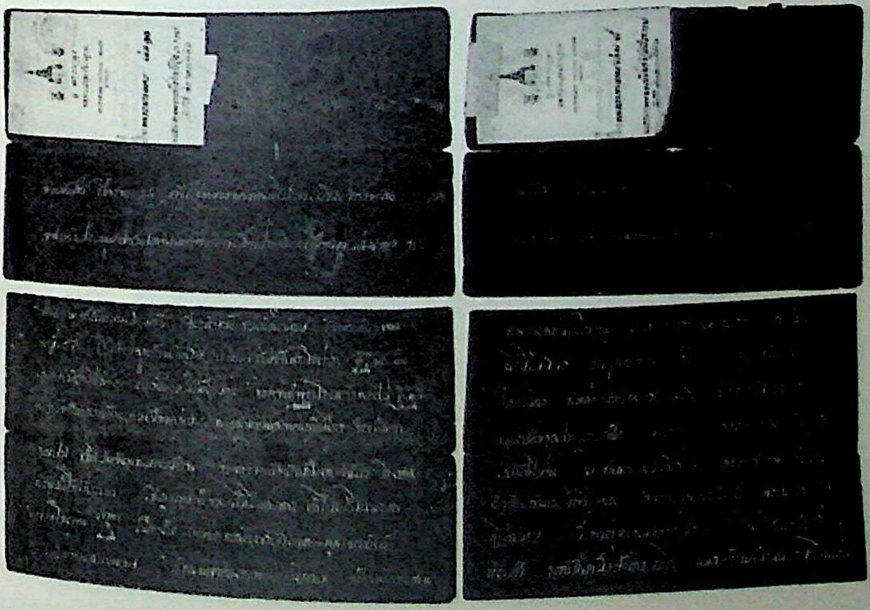


**Figure 17:** Manuscript no. 9, pp 2-3 (upper left) and pp. 100-101 (lower left), in comparison with Manuscript no. 7, pp. 2-3 (upper right) and pp. 42-43 (lower right).

The main difference between Manuscript no. 9 and Manuscript no. 7 is that the letters on the recto of Manuscript no. 9 are smaller. However, the lettering patterns are similar and certain words are spelled the same, suggesting that the same scribe transcribed the two manuscripts around the same time.

## 10. Manuscript no. 10

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

**Title:** *Phra Rot-Meri*

**Physical Description:** White writing on black *khòi* paper, 83 pages

**Provenance:** Owned by Prince Wongsathiratsanit and later by Prince Rangsit. Donated to the library on February 6, 1916.

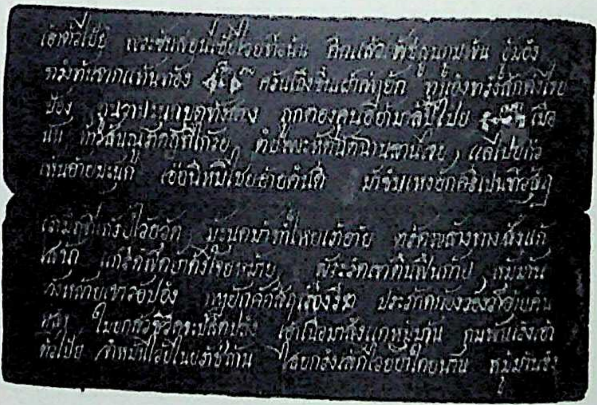


Figure 18. Manuscript no 10, page 5; episode: From Thao Sannurat imprisoning Phra Rot to Phra Rot entering Dasanari's room.

According to the colophon by the National Library, Manuscript no. 10 originally belonged to Prince Wongsatiratsanit and was possibly passed on to Prince Rangsit. The first page of recto and the last page of verso have been lost. There is no record of transcription date, nor of performance date and actors' wages. Accordingly, it is impossible to determine whether this play had ever been performed.

The letters are written in white lines, possibly pearls. The handwriting differs from other manuscripts; certain letters, such as ธ, are in a style that was widely used from the Thonburi era until the early years of the reign of Rama I.

## 11. Manuscript no 1 and Manuscript no. 2 (Western notebooks)

Literature section, Manuscripts and Inscriptions group, National Library, Bangkok

Title: *Phra Rot*, Volumes 1 and 2

Physical description: Two Western notebooks written in black pencil or graphite. Manuscript no. 1 has 18 pages and no. 2 has 80 pages.

Provenance: Originally belonged to His Serene Highness Prince Watcharin (หม่อมเจ้าวัชรินทร). Later bought by Vajirañāna Library in Bangkok era 131 (1912).

Neither of the Western books contains a copy date. Examination reveals that they may be copied from Manuscript no. 5 as they have the same content. Writing protocols, however, are close to present-day orthography. The story events are in correct sequence, unlike those in Manuscript no. 5, which are inverted. In conclusion, both Western notebooks were copied from Manuscript no. 5 and were probably written late in Rama V's reign or thereafter.

The text starts with Indra coming down to earth to cure Nang Sipsòng's eyes with an elixir. Then the ogress Sunnatra feigns illness and incites Phra Rotthasit to fight Phra Rotthasen. Phra Rotthasen kills Sunnatra. The story ends with Phra Rotthasit inviting Nang Sipsòng to return to the town. In this version, Indra cures Nang Sipsòng's eyes; in other versions, this is attributed to Phra Rot or Phra Rotthasen.

The first pages of both Western books are branded with the Watcharin crest. His Serene Highness Prince Watcharin probably refers to His Serene Highness Prince Watcharin Singhara (1850–April 3, 1918). He was the son of Prince Bodin Phaisansophon, director of the Printing Department (กรมอักษรพิมพการ) (Fine Arts Department 1969, 42) of the royal palace during the reigns of Rama VI and Rama V.

## Observations on *Bot Lakhòn Nòk Phra Rot-Meri* manuscripts

First, there are nine black *khòi* paper manuscripts, one white (greyish) *khòi* paper manuscript and two Western notebooks made of industrial paper. Eight blackened manuscripts are inscribed in white chalk, and one with yellow lettering. Graphite is used on one white *khòi* paper manuscript, pearl lines (white lines) on another. The handwriting of the scribes is sometimes elegant (scribal hand; Manuscript no.4) and sometimes untidy. Some manuscripts feature up to five different handwriting styles, such as Manuscript no. 5, suggesting several scribes. Moreover, the text insertions and poems in Manuscript no. 7 are in different handwriting to the original scribe, suggesting revision and improvement for later performances.

Second, the ages of the manuscripts can only be roughly determined by examining the handwriting and orthography, because the scribes did not record transmission dates. It is necessary to compare the characteristics of the scripts to pinpoint the age of the manuscripts: the scripts in Manuscript no. 2 resemble documents from the Rama III era (1824-1851); Manuscripts nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 contain handwriting typical of the Bangkok period.

Moreover, handwriting and orthography demonstrate that all the manuscripts are related. Manuscript nos. 6 and 8 are in the same handwriting, suggesting the same scribe. Manuscript nos. 7 and 9 originally belonged to Phraya Phetpani and were likely copied by the same scribe, especially in light of the similar handwriting. Moreover, these two stories can be performed in sequence.

Third, the manuscripts can be divided into three groups by their histories. The first group comprises manuscripts with vague provenance: "Original copy at the library" or "Original copy at the Vajirañāna Library." This applies to manuscript nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8. The second group contains the manuscripts labeled "Bought by Vajirañāna Library," specifically Western notebooks 1 and 2. The third group is made up of manuscripts with clear provenance: Manuscript no. 1 was donated by Phrakhru Khantayakhom (Im) (พระครูขันตยาคม (อิ่ม)); Manuscript no. 2 by Mrs. Thongyu Chanyakul (นางทองอยู่ จรรยากุล); manuscript nos. 7 and 9 originally belonged to Phraya Phetpani (พระยาเพชรปาณี); and Manuscript no. 10 was donated by Prince Rangsit (กรมหมื่นไชยนารถนเรนทร). The provenances of some manuscripts indicate document age, such as Manuscript no. 3, which has no bibliography, but was copied by Phraya Pariyattithammathada (พระยาปริยัติธรรมธาดา (แพ ตาละลักษมณ์)) for the library according to a *Phra Rot* compilation (Fine Arts Department, 2009: 10). Although this means Manuscript no. 3 was copied during Rama V's reign (1868–1910), the text might be older than the document.

Originally, Manuscript no. 10 belonged to Prince Wongsathiratsanit (พระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอ กรมหลวงวงศาธิราชสนิท; 1808–1870). It was then passed on to Prince Rangsit (1885–1952). The characters in this manuscript resemble those written during the Thonburi period and Rama I period. Moreover, Prince Wongsathiratsanit spanned the reigns of Rama II and Rama IV, so this manuscript could have been transcribed in or before the Rama II era. It cannot be determined whether it dates back as far as the Ayutthaya era.

Fourth, each manuscript contains different texts, except for Western notebook manuscripts 1 and 2, which share the text of Manuscript no. 5. The notebook texts were transcribed from Manuscript no. 5, but the order of events is corrected. Moreover, the text in Manuscript no. 5 and the Western notebooks differs from the other manuscripts and other versions of *Phra Rot-Meri*, such as *Phra Rot Kham Chan*, *Phra Rot Klòn An*, and *Phra Rot Nirat*. Specifically, Indra cures Nang Sipsòng's eyes, instead of

Phra Rot. It is possible that this version of *Phra Rot-Meri* was written later to differentiate it from earlier versions.

Investigation reveals that the text in Manuscript no. 4 was not a play, but *Phra Rot Nirat*, with which it has shared text (Manuscript no. 18, Nirat Type, Literature section). Manuscript no. 4 also contains accompanying songs (*Phleng Na Phat*), suggesting an attempt to convert *Phra Rot Nirat* into *Bot Lakhòn Nòk*. Similarly, early Bangkok period poems were sometimes transformed into *Mahori* songs.

For example, Chao Phraya Phra Khlang (Hon) composed *Kaki* (กากี) poems and turned them into songs for *Mahori* ensembles. Similar text modification was also applied to *Phra Rot-Meri*. Boontuen Sriworaphot (2017) suggests that Chao Phraya Phra Khlang (Hon) converted the Ayutthaya version of *Phra Rot Kham Chan* to *Phra Rot Nirat* and later used it as the lyrics of a *Mahori* song. This indicates that Manuscript no. 4 was written during the Bangkok period, while the handwriting implies it was copied during Rama V's reign (1868–1910).

Lastly, the paratexts in some manuscripts have been overlooked by former readers, as the messages are not reflected the text. Some paratexts indicate the time of writing, such as Manuscript no. 2, which states the location of the performances as *Taphan Hok* gambling den. Construction of *Taphan Hok* or *Saphan Hok* (Hok Bridge) was completed early in Rama V's reign. This is probably the period of the performance, although the document could have been transcribed earlier. However, performance dates were listed, but not the years, so manuscript age cannot be specified.

The writing of the text in Manuscript no. 5 is by the same hand as a hidden message behind the document information label: "Saturday, the first day of the waxing moon, the eleventh lunar month, the year of the monkey" (Saturday September 26, 1908, and Saturday September 20, 1884), during King Rama V's reign (1868–1910). One of the two dates could be the starting date for the transcription.

Different aspects of the manuscripts provide further information about *Bot Lakhòn Nòk Phra Rot-Meri* and facilitate estimations of document age. To specify the age of each manuscript, however, requires close examination of both manuscript texts and paratexts.

## Conclusion

Investigation of *Phra Rot-Meri* manuscripts reveals typical attributes of folk dance-drama play manuscripts, such as the rough period of manuscripts, paratexts, and the text transmission. Judging by the handwriting, almost all the manuscripts were transmitted and written during the Bangkok period, except for Manuscript nos. 10 and 3. Manuscript no. 10 contains scripts found in documents prior to Rama I's reign, but there is no evidence of the era of writing. Manuscript no. 3 contains poems written in the style of older plays, suggesting that although written in the Bangkok era, the text might originate in the late Ayutthaya period. Manuscript nos. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 and the Western notebooks were all written during the Bangkok period. Although copying of manuscripts was conducted in the Bangkok period, the story of *Phra Rot-Meri* can be traced back to the Ayutthaya period.

Paratexts, the overlooked parts, are revealed by examining specific manuscript elements. They indicate actual use of play manuscripts for performances. For example, the list of names and monetary units in Manuscript no. 2 are possibly performance wages, and the date hidden behind the cover of Manuscript no. 5 could be its production date. Moreover, paratexts inserted among verses indicate accompanying songs, which differentiates *Bot Lakhòn Nòk* play manuscripts from other genres. Paratexts provide vital clues to manuscript usage.

Finally, text modifications in Manuscript no. 4, converting *Phra Rot Nirat* verses into *Phra Rot-Meri* plays, indicate the transmission of text and changes in literary genre characteristic of the early Bangkok period. Examination of such aspects of manuscripts as orthography, scripts, and paratexts is a critical tool to provide accurate and thorough literary information.

## Endnote: An Investigation of *Bot Lakhòn Nòk* Manuscripts

1. The paper was originally presented at the 13th Conference on Thai Studies in Chiang Mai on July 17, 2017.

2. The first publish in 1912 C.E. in the ceremony of presenting robes to monk at Kruewan Temple (งานกฐินพระราชทาน มหาอำมาตย์โท พระยาพิเชตพิเศษพิสัยวินิจฉัยโกศล ณ วัดเครือวัลย์).

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**Manuscripts**

Manuscript no. 1: *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 1. Black *khòi* paper, Thai script, Thai language, white chalk, 68 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
พระรถเมรี เล่ม ๑

Manuscript no. 2: *Phra Rot-Meri*. Black *khòi* paper, Thai script, Thai language, white chalk, 28 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand. พระรถเมรี

Manuscript no. 3: *Phra Rot-Meri*. Black *khòi* paper, Thai script, Thai language, white pencil, 93 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand. พระรถเมรี

Manuscript no. 4: *Phra Rot-Meri*. Black *khòi* paper, Thai script, Thai language, yellow strokes, 62 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand. พระรถเมรี

Manuscript no. 5: *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 7; episode: Phra Rot offering Bengal Currants. White *khòi* (greyish) paper, Thai script, Thai language, graphite, 93 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
พระรถเมรี เล่ม ๗ ตอนพระรถถวายงั่วหาวนาวให่

Manuscript no. 6: *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 8; episode: Phra Rot battling Nang Santra. Black *khòi* paper. Thai script, Thai language, white chalk, 115 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
พระรถเมรี เล่ม ๘ ตอนพระรถรบกับนางสารตรา

Manuscript no. 7: *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 8; episode: from Phra Rot fleeing Nang Meri to Phra Rot offering Bengal Currants. Black *khòi* paper, Thai script, Thai language, white chalk, 111 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
พระรถเมรี เล่ม ๘ ตอนพระรถหนีนางเมรีจนกระทั่งพระรถถวายงั่วหาวนาวให่

Manuscript no. 8: *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 9; episode: Phra Rot copulating with Dasanari. Black *khòi* paper, Thai script, Thai language, white chalk, 100 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
พระรถเมรี เล่ม ๙ ตอนพระรถเข้าห้องนางทศนารี

Manuscript no. 9: *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 10. Black *khòi* paper, Thai script, Thai language, white chalk, 102 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
พระรถเมรี เล่ม ๑๐

Manuscript no. 10: *Phra Rot-Meri*. Black *khòi* paper, Thai script, Thai language, white lines, 83 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand. พระรถเมรี

Manuscript no. 18: *Phra Rot Nirat*. Thai script, Thai language. Nirat subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
พระรถนิราศ

Manuscript no. 1: *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 1. Western notebook, Thai script, Thai language, graphite, 18 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
พระรถเมรี เล่ม ๑

Manuscript no. 2: *Phra Rot-Meri* Volume 2. Western notebook, Thai script, Thai language, graphite, 80 pages. Klòn Bot Lakhòn subsection, Literature section, the Manuscript Collection, National Library of Thailand.
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### Interview

Boonteun Srivorapot (บุญเตือน ศรีวรพจน์), a specialist of the Fine Arts Department, Bangkok). Interviewed at the Office of Literature and History, March 2017.

# PART 3

# TAI MANUSCRIPTS AND CULTURAL REVIVAL

# Contextualizing Tai Buddhist Manuscripts in the 21st Century: Preliminary Research on Databases in Thailand and Beyond and the Revival of Buddhist Manuscript Culture

## PHIBUL CHOOMPOLPAISAL

Tai manuscripts have been highly mobile over the last 400 years because of political diplomacy, trade, missionary work, and tourism. They have been distributed throughout important archives around the world. This chapter reports on research in progress, providing an up-to-date account of work on Tai Buddhist manuscripts in the West and in Thailand. It calls into question the role of manuscripts in the 21st century, as digitization transforms manual records into online databases. Applying digital and database technologies to conservation work enables identification of manuscripts with the same titles or contents in different locations, thus incorporating global and national Thai contexts to manuscript work and to databases.

In the West, large collections may house more than a hundred Tai manuscripts; in Thailand, large collections run into thousands of items. Progress on manuscript work in Thailand is linked to methods of coping with millions of fascicles. Moreover, in the 21st century there have been attempts to revive "Buddhist manuscript culture," a culture that considers manuscripts to be part of a living Buddhist tradition that transcends textual content. Over the past few years, the trend toward treating manuscripts as sacred has gained momentum. It is also crucial to consider psycho-religious effects when evaluating manuscript work. The chapter ends with a critical assessment of manuscript work in Thailand. Such an evaluation takes into account the differences in technological advancement in the West and Thailand and also incorporates psychological, cultural, and other factors.

## Introduction

> "I'm searching for those things more precious than my life.
> This is guiding me in all the steps I take . . .
> I came across and read a great old text.
> Although it may be torn and some parts lost
> What's left will help me understand
> About life and everything,
> But this treasure from the past could disappear . . .
> This breaks my heart and I just want to cry . . .
> My beating heart grows weak, my eyes are filled with tears,
> For what I see tells me the way is still so hard.
> My dream is unfulfilled because I cannot do it all alone.
> I need other hands and hearts to take me to that dream.
> Hand in hand we all can make a dream comes true.
> On that day we'll see the Dhamma save the world."[1]

The recent popularity of this "Tears for palm-leaf manuscripts" song marks a new phase in manuscript work in Thailand. Multimedia technologies now allow songs to play an important role in the revival of Buddhist manuscript culture by raising public awareness of the significance of Tai Buddhist manuscripts. Released in August 2015, the lyrics express Buddhist manuscript culture in a national Thai context. Thai Buddhist textual scholars regard Buddhist manuscripts both as resources for preserving textual contents and knowledge about Buddhism and as sacred, devotional objects facilitating the survival, continuity, and preservation of Buddhism as a living religion. Traditionally, Buddhist manuscripts are important textual authorities that provide and preserve religio-cultural Buddhist teachings. They give practical and moral guidance for daily living and spiritual guidance in pursuit of soteriological goals.

The song was produced by the Manuscript Conservation Association, a charitable organization established in August 2015 by a group of leading Thai scholars and manuscript specialists.[2] It was first released in Thai, then as an edited English version. In July 2016, famous Thai singer Noi Nae,[3] winner of the 2014 The Voice TV award, performed this song at a conference to an audience of more than 100, including scholars, senior monks, government representatives, university students, and practicing Buddhists. The sadness in Noi Nae's voice drove some Thai listeners to tears. Following the conference, many manuscript specialists and volunteers uploaded the song to their computers and mobile phones to play it back later for personal motivation. Local Buddhist communities adopted the song a few months later to promote Buddhist manuscript culture. From September to December 2016, a group of 10 to15 high school students and other local supporters gathered regularly to sing "Tears for palm-leaf manuscripts" at Wat Sung Men,[4] which houses the largest manuscript collection in Phrae province in the north of Thailand.

The song describes manuscript work as something that one "cannot do . . . all alone . . . but . . . need[s] other hands and hearts" to help. This statement reinforces the fact that it is time to work in collaboration and share resources — the number of manuscript specialists actively working nationwide is less than 30, while there are millions of manuscript fascicles in Thailand.[5] The figures indicate that there is little chance that all the work can be finished by a small group of specialists without public support. Each step of manuscript work takes a long time and requires a lot of human, financial, and technological resources. A typical workflow includes cataloging, digitizing, archiving (in databases), translating, and conserving physical manuscripts, as well as disseminating the extracted knowledge. For just 1,000 manuscript items, each step could take months or years.[6]

Moreover, several "Tai" scripts, including Khòm and Lan Na (Tham Lan Na), feature in manuscripts in Thailand and abroad, necessitating specialists with different script and language expertise. "Tai" is used instead of "Thai" in this chapter to include manuscripts of both central Thai people and local ethnic groups that reside in or derive from Thailand. The phrase "Siamese manuscript" refers to manuscripts that are linked to the history of central Thai states from the Ayutthaya period to the early modern period.

The song also raises concerns about loss and damage. Manuscripts can easily be destroyed: by damp, by insects, by rodents, and occasionally by human beings. They need to be cared for and kept in suitable conditions. Manuscripts are sold to make money, especially to collectors and tourists. Often they disappear, never to be seen again in Thai temples and archives. The song stresses that conservation work is a matter of urgency to preserve knowledge that could be lost forever. The lyrics also echo the fears of many Thais, especially conservative scholars, that a part of Thai heritage is being irretrievably transferred overseas.

The reactions by the Fine Arts Department, Buddhist monks, and various organizations is to speed up work on preservation and revive "Buddhist manuscript culture" (*watthanatham ekkasan boran chao phut*),[7] a phrase that is gaining in popularity. Manuscripts are gradually finding new life at the heart of both religious practices and communities. Buddhist manuscript culture reasserts the premodern Buddhist view that a Buddhist practitioner is obliged to support and contribute to work on Buddhist manuscripts. Such contributions accrue great merit in pursuit of soteriological goals. According to Veerasak Khongdeum, premodern Thai Buddhists believed that any contribution to writing or inscribing gains merit comparable to the casting of Buddha statues.[8] According to the *Cūla-ganthavamsa* text, merit from inscribing a single letter equates to merit for casting of Buddha statues and constructing stupa.[9]

The contents of the song raise several issues relevant to later discussions and make two important points relating to the progress of work in Thailand. First, the lyrics imply that the sacred or religio-psychological dimension of Buddhist manuscripts is significant to local Buddhists. The spiritual and devotional aspects of manuscripts must be considered when evaluating work in progress in Thailand. This is not the case for work by non-Tai Buddhists, which is concerned with contents, knowledge, and preservation of actual textual objects. Second, the melancholy tone of the song suggests that despite its significance, work on Tai manuscripts is not progressing as rapidly as it deserves. This is addressed in the second part of this chapter, which deals with the progress of Tai manuscript work inside Thailand. Much information about work in Thailand is based on my research from 2014 to present. Updates and comparisons between work by Thai and non-Thai scholars pay attention to progress in cataloging, in database technologies, in research, and in recent attempts to revive manuscript cultures as a living tradition. The differences in progress in manuscript work in Thailand and the West are the basis for a final assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of work in Thailand, along with reflections on obstacles to overall progress.

Scrutiny of collections and work in the West serves as a basis for an overview of work on Tai manuscripts. Barend Jan Terwiel's *Manuscript Collections Relating to Thai History in Europe* (undated) and the recent publication edited by Justin McDaniel, *Collectors and Collections in the History of Thai Manuscripts* in 2016 underpin this investigation. Contributors to McDaniel 2016 include Jana Igunma on Tai manuscripts in the British Library, Terwiel on collections in Germany, McDaniel on collections in Ireland, and Susanne Ryuyin Kerekes and McDaniel on collections in the United States. Additional contents based on my own research bring materials up to date. The update on Germany includes recent work on Tai manuscripts by Volker Grabowsky.

# Overview of Tai manuscript collections in the West

Thai-Tai manuscripts have been globally mobile over the past 400 years. Diplomacy, trade, missionary work, and tourism have dispersed manuscripts to important archives in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the United States, Japan, Laos, and elsewhere. Tai manuscripts in the West do not necessarily imply a Buddhist community. Westerners are generally more concerned with contents and preservation of artefacts than ritualized religio-psychological aspects. Moreover, the focus on contents means that Western interest spans manuscripts relating to Buddhism and non-Buddhist materials.[10]

Western acquisition and collections of Tai manuscripts have passed through several phases of development during the past few centuries. From as early as the 17th century until the early 20th century, diplomatic correspondence between Siam and Europe resulted in dispatch of manuscripts to the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other European countries. Colonization from the 19th to early 20th centuries caused unprecedented numbers of Tai manuscripts to be shipped to the West. During this period, Western traders, scholars, and missionaries took back huge quantities of Southeast Asian resources and cultural objects, driven by surging interest in Southeast Asian cultures. Modernization and technology had improved the speed of transportation and communication technology and played a crucial role in the delivery of manuscripts to the West (Phibul 2013, 100–102 and 109–110). Significant work on Tai manuscripts kept in the West only began in the mid-20th century, when such scholars as Klaus Wenk and Henry Ginsburg started to catalog manuscripts manually. The 21st century saw a new phase of manuscript work, as digitization transformed manuscript databases from manual to online resources. Tai archives in various countries feature manuscripts with a range of contents at different stages of development. Moreover, different types of database systems are employed in their management.

In the Netherlands, Siamese manuscripts are kept in the General State Archives (Hague), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Hague), the Royal Tropical Institute (Amsterdam), and the family archives of Homan van der Heide, a prominent Dutch Thai historian. These manuscripts include hundreds of letters and reports, dating from the 17th century to the mid-20th century. Researchers can access texts via microfilm reels, rather than original manuscripts. A wealth of information related to Ayutthaya history, dating back to the 1680s, is kept in the General State Archives in the Hague. A collection of consular archives from Bangkok spanning 1860 to the 1940s is housed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hague (Terwiel, undated).

In Germany, manuscripts concerning relations between Germany and Thailand are primarily kept in the archives of the German Foreign Office in Berlin. A few of these documents date back to the 17th century. Photocopies can be obtained from the Foreign Office or through the Thai Department at the University of Hamburg (Terwiel, 2016a; 82). The majority of Tai manuscripts in German care are at the Berlin Museum of Ethnology, the State Library in Munich, and other museums and libraries. They arrived as a result of colonization in the 19th century and early 20th century, when foreign Thai government employees (such as the king's photographer, F. Gerhard Schumann), scholars (Adolf Bastian and others), missionaries (Elias Röttchen), and traders (Oscar Frankfurter) brought manuscripts back to Germany (Terwiel 2016a, 82 and 86–102).

German collections include manuscripts from Thailand, Laos, and the Shan States of northern Myanmar (Terwiel, undated). Only a minority of Siamese manuscripts concern political relations between Germany and Thailand. Klaus Wenk's publications (1963 and 1968) on Thai manuscripts kept in Germany included a list of 246 manuscripts, categorized into eight subject areas: astrology, dream-interpretation and folklore, Buddhism, history, literature, medicine, laws, and picture books, translations and typologies. Terwiel points out that Wenk's list omits many manuscripts in the Khòm script, so the total number of Tai manuscripts in Germany may exceed 250. He claims that a handwritten catalog from the Bavarian Library lists 278 Tai manuscript items (Terwiel 2016a, 82–86). The vast corpus of Tai manuscripts in Germany includes works of great significance. Just recently, Terwiel discovered two 3.7-meter scrolls in the Dresden State Archive depicting the funeral procession of King Phetracha of Ayutthaya, which took place on December 26, 1704 (Terwiel 2016b, 79–94; Choompolpaisal 2016a: B8).

Terwiel, Wenk, and others tend to focus on large manuscript collections. Panarut and Grabowsky (2015) highlight small, rural collections; they identified 10 Thai manuscripts in the Nordsee Museum (Nissenhaus, Husum) in northern Germany. Acquired from Siam in the 1890s, these unique items feature content ranging from religious to medical and magical contents and span a period of 100 years (Peera and Grabowsky 2015, 199–234).

Recent developments in Germany include an online catalog and digitized images of selected Tai manuscripts on the website of the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin; accessed June 28, 2017). According to Thoralf Hanstein, who developed this database, there are images of around 200 Tai manuscripts. Half of the collection is in Thai, and the remainder in Lan Na. Contents range from Buddhism and astrology to literature.[11]

Moreover, Grabowsky and Apiradee Techasiriwan inaugurated the Organization of Historical Knowledge in Tai Lü Manuscripts project, based at the University of Hamburg. Since 2011, they have worked on 56 Tai Lü manuscripts from Yunnan and 30 from Laos, exploring the organization of historical knowledge as reflected in such paratextual components as colophons, prefaces, and postscripts, as well as headings and other visual elements structuring the text. This is just one project by non-Thai scholars and organizations that has made an important contribution to work on Tai Lü manuscripts since the 1980s. According to Grabowsky and Techasiriwan (2014), Tai Lü manuscript culture was healthy until the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1950s, when up to 90% of all Tai Lü manuscript heritage was destroyed. There has been a revival since the 1980s, supported by several academic projects. In 1998, Japanese historian Kumiko Kato of the University of Nagoya and her Thai husband Isra Yananthan initiated the first survey of Tai Lü manuscripts in Sipsong Panna in collaboration with Ai Kham, a local scholar in charge of the collection in Zhou Zheng Xie, and he late Chao Maha Khanthawong (Dao Jinxiang). Kato's 2001 catalog includes more than 6,500 manuscripts in monastic libraries and private collections. In 2004, Yunnan University ran a project to survey, catalog, and microfilm Tai Nüa manuscripts in Gengma County, Lingcang Prefecture. The catalog, published in 2005, records almost 200 Tai Nüa and 22 Tai Lü manuscripts. In 2010, a Yunnan Provincial Archive catalog of manuscripts from the county of Moeng Laem, on the border with Burma, listed a further 142 Tai Lü manuscripts. A project by Payap University (Chiang Mai) was initiated in 2012 under Ratanaporn Setthakul, compiling 210 Tai Lü manuscripts. The archive is accessible in digitized format, but only provides transcriptions in the modern Thai script (Grabowsky and Apiradee 2014, 8–12).

The first Siamese manuscripts came to Britain during the 17th century, following the establishment of economic relations with Siam, primarily through trade. Early British collections give accounts of these relations, based mainly on the writings of a member of the first English expedition, Peter Floris, and on the records of the East India Company. This collection of is now housed at the British Library, as part of the most expansive collections of Tai manuscripts in the United Kingdom and one of the most significant in Europe. Key manuscripts at the library include a *Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya*, donated by James Hayese, who lived in Bangkok in 1847. Subject areas range from Buddhism to medicine and law(Igunma 2016, 22–81).

Tai manuscripts came to the United Kingdom during the colonial era in the 19th century and early 20th century through trade, diplomatic relations, and missionary contacts. During this period, the British Library was gifted manuscripts by scholars, traders, and missionaries and purchased others through auctions. Henry David Ginsburg, who worked for the British Library from the 1970s to 2002, made important contributions to the development Thai, Lao, Cambodian, Lan Na, Shan, Tai Lü, and other Tai manuscripts. He cataloged, researched and vastly expanded the library's corpus. The Tai manuscript collection in the British Library has increased from about 100 in 1973 to its current total of around 300 manuscripts.[12]

Developments in the past 10 years include two important projects: the digitization of Tai manuscripts and establishment of a digital library, and the cataloging of an endangered archive of Tai Ahom manuscripts. The former was run initially under financial support from the royal Thai government (2008–2012) and subsequently from the Henry Ginsburg legacy (2013 to present). So far, the British Library has digitized more than 80 selected Thai, Lao, and Cambodian manuscripts and made them available online.[13] The Endangered Archives Project on Ahom manuscripts aims to digitize and catalog approximately 500 manuscripts (20,000 pages).[14]

The Bodleian Library of Oxford University has 10–20 central Thai manuscripts and more than 100 Shan manuscripts. The central Thai manuscripts date back to the 18th century and include extracts from the Pāli Canon and *Phra Malai* (Igunma 2016, 59–60). In December 2016, the Bodleian Library identified and cataloged about 10 central Siamese manuscripts with the help of Thai scholars from the Manuscript Conservation Association. Important works in the Bodleian Library include Revealing Hidden Collections: Buddhist Literature in the UK and Southeast Asian Collections. Starting in 2011, this project has been creating a unified online catalog of Shan manuscripts, primarily focusing on Shan *lik long* texts held at Oxford University, Cambridge University, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and a number of temple libraries in northern Thailand and Myanmar. Once completed, a database of approximately 1,500 Shan *lik long* texts will be available on the Bodleian Library's website.[15]

There is another large collection of Tai manuscripts at Cambridge University Library, including 432 Shan *lik long* manuscripts. In addition, there are small collections of Tai manuscripts requiring additional work at various locations in the UK. These include the libraries and archives at SOAS (10+ items), the Warburg Institute in London (approximately 10 items), the Welcome Institute (67 items), and the Royal Asiatic Society London (26 items).[16]

In France, the two largest collections of manuscripts relating to relations between France and Siam are the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, and the Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence. Buddhist manuscripts are mostly located in the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO). Manuscripts on Tai minorities in various Tai scripts are found in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Other texts, including missionary documents dating back to the 17th century, are kept in the archives of the Missions Etrangères, Paris. Cataloging is mainly by index cards, but microfilms of some documents are available (Terwiel, undated). According to Peera Panarut, hundreds of Thai-Tai manuscripts are also preserved at the National Library of France (Paris) and the Library of EFEO (Paris). Several Siamese manuscripts from the National Library of France in Ayutthaya handwriting have even been edited and published by Thailand's Fine Arts Department over the last few decades.[17]

A collection of approximately 20 Buddhist texts was sent to the Vatican Museum in the early 20th century, during the colonization era.[18] The most prestigious are the royal *Abhidhamma* and *Phra Malai* texts that King Rama VII (r. 1925–1935) gave to Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) on March 21, 1934, while in exile. Following Thailand's democratization in 1932 and the abolition of the absolute monarchy, power fell into the hands of a non-royalist military government. In response, King Rama VII sought to establish relationships with Pope Pius XI. These Buddhist manuscripts in the Khòm script and Pāli-Thai language were presented as royal gifts.[19] Over the last 60 years, there have been other attempts to establish relations between the Vatican and influential monks in Thailand through discussions about collaborative work to catalog Buddhist manuscripts in the Vatican museum. In the late 1950s, Phimonlatham, the abbot of Wat Mahathat and the third most influential Thai monk at that time, visited Pope Pius XII (1939–1958).[20] In 1972, the Supreme Patriarch Poon Punnasiri, abbot of Wat Pho, visited Pope Paul VI (1963–1978). Notwithstanding a history of such visits, collaboration on manuscript work only took place in 2016, when Phrasutthee Thammanuvat (Theab), assisting abbot of Wat Pho, headed a team that cataloged, transliterated, and translated Tai manuscripts from the Vatican.[21] The project became the first collaborative work on manuscripts between Christian priests and Thai Buddhist monks.

Elsewhere in Europe, important collections of Tai manuscripts are held at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (approximately 48), the National Library in Copenhagen (116), and the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels (unknown, but probably 10+).[22] McDaniel recently fully cataloged Tai manuscripts in the Chester Beatty collection; manuscript subjects range from Buddhism to sports and agriculture, showcasing rare scenes of hunting and games (McDaniel 2015, 3). Some images from the manuscripts are accessible online, but only with permission from the library.[23] The collection at the National Library of Denmark was cataloged by Georges Coedes and published in 1962 (Terwiel undated).

In addition to the abovementioned Tai collections in various places in Europe where identification, cataloging and research are ongoing,[24] there are other locations where Tai collections are kept, but with no reports of work yet carried out. These include collections in Portugal and Spain that await further investigation.[25]

In the United States, Susanne Ryuyin Kerekes and Justin McDaniel recently reported that there are around 650 Tai manuscripts in 20 institutions across the country. Most Tai manuscripts came to the United States during the colonial era, from the 19th century to the mid-20th century. The majority of 19th century collectors had scientific/medical or Christian backgrounds; more than half were women.

Manuscript subjects range from Buddhism and Christianity to medicine, Thai gymnastics, tax records, and marriage laws. One important Christian manuscript includes a Thai translation of the Gospel of Matthew, now kept in Penn Museum. Emilie Royce Bradley, wife of Doctor Dan Beach Bradley (the first Western court physician in Siam), sent this manuscript to the United States in the 1830s or 1840s. The manuscript adopts Buddhist terminology to teach Christianity in the modern era (Kerekes and McDaniel 2016, 202–208, 213–214).

Major collections in the United States are held in libraries and archives at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, the University of California in Berkeley, the University of Michigan, the Library of Congress in Washington DC, the New York Public Library, Harvard University, Princeton University, the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, and the University of Pennsylvania. Collections are cataloged, accessible, and well organized, and many facilities have preservation laboratories. However, the majority of staff cannot read Thai or Tai scripts. Accordingly, many manuscripts are incorrectly cataloged, for example as Chinese or Burmese. Most collections require thorough re-examination (Kerekes and McDaniel 2016, 207).

Most US collections are only partially cataloged, with two exceptions: Walters Art Museum and the University of Pennsylvania. The majority of websites only list manuscript titles. Some, however, provide manuscript images: the Asian Art Museum, and the libraries of the University of California, Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Northern Illinois University (Kerekes and McDaniel 2016, 207–209). The University of Arizona and the Cantor Arts Centre at Stanford University provide single images for specific manuscripts online. According to Kerekes and McDaniel, there are 15 Tai manuscripts at Walters Art Museum, 16 at the Asian Art Museum, 15 at Princeton University Library, 56 at New York Public Library, 23 in the Berkeley Swift Family

Collection (University of California), 53 in Michigan's collection, and approximately 200 at Cornell.[26] The size of Tai manuscript collections varies from a few in smaller archives to more than 50 in larger ones.

## Digital libraries and databases of Thai-Tai manuscripts in the 21st Century

Most catalogs of Tai manuscripts in Europe and the United States still need work: sorting out miscellaneous errors, rechecking, and completion of manual catalogs. Insufficient Tai-language specialists hinder this work. Some institutions have sufficiently developed IT capabilities to harness databases to provide digital catalogs and online image archives. In Europe, these comprise the British Library, the Bodleian Library, the Library of the State University of Berlin, and the Chester Beatty Library in Ireland. In the United States, seven institutions meet these criteria. Overall, the development of manual databases into digital libraries of Tai manuscripts has been more successful in the United States, Britain, Germany, and Ireland than in the rest of the world.

In addition to work on digital libraries, Western institutions and scholars have implemented digital technologies that make selected manuscripts in Thailand and Laos to accessible online:

1. The Digital Library of Northern Thai Manuscripts Project (DLNTM) has a database of 5,520 manuscripts[27] from nine provinces: eight provinces in the Lan Na area (Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Nan, and Phayao), and one in Tak province. Funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, the German Foreign Office, and the University of Pennsylvania, the project is a collaboration between the University of Pennsylvania, Chiang Mai University, the National Library of Laos, and the Berlin State Library.

2. Chiang Mai University's Digital Library (CMUL) hosts a database of 881 manuscripts from the Lan Na area. The online database was designed and created by CMUL staff. Searchable images are taken from microfilm kept at CMUL. Funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, image production was based on manuscript digitization during the 1980s by Chiang Mai University under M.R. Rujaya Abhakorn.[28]
3. École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO)'s Digital Library of Lan Na manuscripts is a database of 19,224 manuscript items/folios with more than 350 entries. The project was a collaboration between EFEO and the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre in Bangkok, an institute under the supervision of the Thai Ministry of Culture. Digitization of manuscripts from 41 selected temples in the Lan Na area was carried out from 2006 and 2011. The digital database was created in 2013.
4. Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre's (SAC's) Manuscripts of Western Thailand is a database of 225 texts from one private collection donated to SAC. Available from 2015 onwards, these digitized texts in Khòm, Burmese, and Mon scripts and Thai-Pāli or Burmese-Pāli languages span two local museums in Nakhon Pathom and four temples in Nakhon Pathom.[29]
5. The National Library of Laos (NLL) has created an online database of searchable manuscripts covering 12,168 texts with support from the German Foreign Office. The majority of the collection consists of Lao manuscripts, but there are some in Tai. For example, images of a Tai Nüa manuscript entitled *ākāra vatta sutta* (1865) is at 11376#3 on the NLL website.

Accessible images on these websites include Tai manuscripts from nine provinces in the Lan Na area (Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Nan, Phayao and Tak), Nakhon Pathom, and Laos. DLNTM, CMUL, and EFEO websites cover the same Lan Na regions. According to DLNTM, texts on its website are in northern Thai (Lan Na), Tai Khün, Tai Lü, Lao, Shan, Burmese, and Pāli languages, and are written in Tham Lan Na, Shan, and many other scripts. The oldest searchable manuscript on the DLNTM website is the *Timsa nipāta* section of *Jātaka aṭṭhakathā vaṇṇanā*, dated 1471, when Chiang Mai was an important centre for Buddhist education and literature. The text is in the Lan Na script and Pāli language.[30] Despite the variety of local languages and scripts in texts on the DLNTM, CMUL, and EFEO websites, the majority are in the Lan Na script and northern Thai-Pāli languages.

Public access is a primary benefit of the DLNTM, CMUL, EFEO, SAC, and NLL websites. Anyone from any part of the world can access and search all the text images. As an example, a search by title for "Abhidhamma" texts on these websites and those of Western institutions outlined above yields the following results.

1. DLNTM: 81 search results, including palm-leaf manuscripts in Lampang, Phrae, Nan, Mae Hong Son, Phayao, and Chiang Mai; 74 are in the Lan Na script and Lan Na-Pāli languages; the other 7 are in Shan and Burmese scripts and Shan- and Burmese-Pāli languages.
2. CMUL: 15 search results featuring manuscripts held in Nan and Chiang Mai; 7 are in Tai Khün-Pāli, 7 in Tai Yuan-Pāli, and 1 in central Thai-Pāli languages.[31]
3. EFEO: 1 search result — a text held at Wat Matukaram in Chiang Mai in the Lan Na script and Lan Na-Pāli languages.[32]
4. SAC: 17 results, all in Nakhon Pathom; 15 in the Khòm script, Thai- Pāli language; the other 2 are in the Shan script and Shan-Pāli language.[33]
5. NLL: 72 search results; most manuscripts (60+) are in the Tham Lao script; around 10 in Lan Na, Tai Lü, and Tai Nüa.
6. Pennsylvania University Library: 3 paper manuscripts.[34]
7. British Library: 2 paper manuscripts are found, both in the Khòm script and Thai-Pāli languages.[35]

These digital libraries generate a total of 194 search results for "abhidhamma," directing the user to texts in Thailand, Britain, and the United States. Closer examination reveals differences in contents, scripts, languages, and locations of the texts for the same title/name ("abhidhamma"). Although DLNTM, CMUL, and EFEO websites cover the same Lan Na region, search results show diversity in scripts and languages. Accordingly, either different texts come up as search results for technical reasons, or these three websites do not cover the same resources in their digital libraries.

Manuscripts continue to be highly mobile. The current location of each manuscript is not necessarily where it was digitized. Nor is manuscript location at the time of digitization necessarily its production site. Local libraries and temple collections perpetually change because of loss, theft, damage, trade, and acquisitions. Although these websites specify text locations, these are locations at the time of digitization. Texts might have been moved or lost. For example, despite an excellent preservation regimen at Wat Sung Men in Phrae province, the number of manuscript fascicles still decreased from 9,835 in 2008 to 9,718 in 2016.[36]

Digital libraries of manuscripts in Thailand and Laos were developed through collaboration between Thai and Lao institutions and Western scholars and institutions. The only exception is the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC) online database, which was developed independently by a Thai institution, under the patronage of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. However, the SAC database mainly contains selected images of manuscripts in Nakhon Pathom. Even for Nakhon Pathom, the total number of searchable manuscripts on the SAC website is low; it does not include the majority of manuscripts in the province. This is also the case with the DLNTM, CMUL, and EFEO websites. Although DLNTM has more search results than the other two, its website includes less than half of the manuscripts kept in the area. According to David Wharton, technical director of the DLNTM project, the database includes images of texts digitized in 120 temples across the eight provinces in the Lan Na region. This gives an average of 15 temples per province. Moreover, only selected manuscripts from these 120 temples were digitized. In Tak province in the north of Thailand, digitization was only carried out at one temple.[37] According to the National Office of Buddhism, there are 4,778 Buddhist temples in eight provinces in Lan Na and Tak.[38] A survey of 120 out of 4,778 temples implies huge numbers of excluded manuscripts.

To date, online databases of selected manuscripts have covered only 10 out of 77 provinces; even in these 10, only a few selected manuscripts are accessible online. Most accessible images are of manuscripts in Lan Na and other local northern Tai scripts. The majority of materials in the Khòm script nationwide are still inaccessible, let alone manuscripts in Tham Lan Na and other Tai scripts. This suggests that centralized Thai resources, such as royal Thai manuscripts, remain largely accessible. To understand why this is the case, it is important to evaluate the current status of manuscript work in Thailand.

## Work on manuscripts in Thailand: Losses, cataloging, and the revival of Buddhist manuscript culture

Prior to Western colonization of Southeast Asia in the mid-19th century, Siamese monks used manuscripts to record and preserve Buddhist teachings. In general, they took meticulous care of Thailand's manuscripts (Skilton and Phibul 2014, 89 and 97). Furthermore, manuscripts on an array of subjects were stored in Buddhist temples, which also served as education centers for most communities. Many monks could read multiple Tai scripts, such as Khòm, Lan Na, and Tham Isan; monks were the language specialists and teachers in most rural areas (Phibul unpublished, Chapter 1).

However, modernization from the late 19th century to the early 20th century reduced the importance of manuscripts to most Buddhists. The majority of provincial Thai monks could only read modern Thai and were no longer conversant in other scripts.[39] There were two main factors behind this change: the Thai government was promoting modern Thai to replace old Tai language and scripts to support political centralization; and education was increasingly based on published books instead of manuscripts.[40] Since the late 19th century, Thai monks and scholars had begun to use printed editions of the Pāli canon. The first printed edition of the Thai Canon, *Chulachomklao Tipitaka*, was published in 1893 under the patronage of King Chulalongkorn (Crosby 2014, 82). As manuscripts became less significant to rural communities during in the early 20th century, the Thai government moved huge collections of manuscripts from rural temples to the Vajirañāṇa Library, which became the National Library in 1933. At present, the National Library is working under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture's Fine Arts Department. The Department of Manuscripts within the National Library bears direct responsibility for manuscript work.[41]

The National Library houses 658,022 manuscript items — the largest manuscript collection in Southeast Asia. Its corpus includes 241,697 palm-leaf manuscript fascicles and 335,144 paper manuscripts. The oldest palm-leaf manuscript, *Samantapāsādikā vinaya-kathā*, dates from 1615. These figures only include manuscripts kept at the Headquarters of the National Library of Thailand in Bangkok and exclude manuscripts held in regional branches of the National Library. The oldest paper manuscript, the royal chronicle in a version of *Luang Prasert*, dates from 1680. Other artefacts include old printed documents and films.[42]

The National Library has 11 provincial branches: Chiang Mai in the north; Chonburi and Chandaburi in the east; Suphanburi in central Thailand; Nakhon Ratchasima and Nakhon Phanom in the northeast; Kanchanaburi in the west; and Nakhon Si Thammarat, Songkhla, Trang, and Hatyai in the south.[43] Over the past two decades, local branches have acquired several thousands of manuscripts from local temples. For example, the Suphanburi branch of the National Library has acquired more than 20,000 fascicles of manuscripts in the last few years. Due to concerns over loss and damage to manuscripts, the Fine Arts Department requested that temples donate manuscripts that cannot be cared for adequately to local branches of the National Library. As a consequence, more than 20 temples with small collections (usually less than 1,000 manuscript fascicles) transferred all or most of their manuscripts. However, most temples with medium (1,000–3,000 fascicles) to large (>3,000 fascicles) collections retained their manuscripts, but enlisted the National Library's help with preservation.[44] Catalog work on manuscripts kept throughout the National Library network remains incomplete, but estimates indicate totals of more than 300,000 fascicles of palm-leaf manuscript facsimiles and over 400,000 paper manuscripts held by local branches of the National Library.

Archiving of manuscripts kept in Bangkok using manual catalog cards is 97% complete; branches of the National Library outside Bangkok are past halfway through this task. Despite work in progress, there are still no plans for public access to digital images and research on manuscript contents.[45] Prapadson Phosithong and other Thai historians have voiced public complaints about access difficulties by repeatedly lobbying the Fine Arts Department.[46] Discontentment arose because the public knows virtually nothing about the manuscripts held in any branch library. The National Library has no means for systematic provision of general information about manuscripts through a database of such basic data as the number of manuscripts held; nor do they allow digitization of manuscripts. Strict policies on access permission and data-sharing hinder research. According to a senior National Library staff member "access is banned for manuscripts relating to sexuality, Thai history, and medicine".[47] This reveals a highly conservative view: the library needs to censor specific types of manuscript that are sensitive for political and economic control. Feminist ideology and controversial historical contents could challenge the existing power hierarchy of Thai society, which is a rigid male-dominated Buddhist structure under royalist control. Access to medical texts enables the business community, especially non-Thai organizations, to produce and market alternative medicines; it also facilitates transfer of knowledge from the Thai people overseas (more on trade below).

Although work by the Department of Manuscripts over the last decade has enabled branches of the National Library to acquire huge collections of manuscripts, the majority of Thai manuscripts remain in temples. There are still more manuscripts outside than inside the National Library system.[48] Officially, each temple legally owns its manuscripts and the responsibility for their care lies with the abbot. On a national level, the Buddhist Council (*Mahathera Samakhom*), the highest Sangha authority in the country, theoretically has control over manuscripts in all temples in the country. However, in practice the Buddhist Council delegates duties relating to manuscript preservation to the abbots. Requests for an abbot's permission to work on a manuscript are met with varying responses. In the case of manuscripts at royal temples in Bangkok, access is extremely difficult. Permission to work on or research any single manuscript is rarely given at any royal temple. In rural areas, permission is granted more easily. However, the increase in theft over the last decade has made it harder to gain access.[49]

In a large scale at national level, work on manuscripts in temple collections in Thailand began in the 1970s, when the Fine Arts Department gave instructions to the Department of Manuscripts to carry out general surveys of manuscripts in several provinces in Thailand.[50] From such investigations, the Department of Manuscripts realized that there were huge collections of unexplored manuscripts nationwide. This pushed the Fine Arts Department to continue with their work. The surveys also fostered basic understanding of some key features of Tai manuscript distribution. For example, manuscripts in different areas, provinces, and regions tend to be differing with regard to scripts. The majority of scripts found in manuscripts are as follows: Lan Na in the north; Khòm in Bangkok and central, west, east, and south of Thailand; Mon in the West; and Tham Isan in the northeast. Lan Na script manuscripts in Thailand date back to the 15th century, but Khòm only to the 17th century.[51]

Initially in the 1970s and 1980s, it was not easy to gain permission to work on manuscripts in many temples. However, the Department of Manuscripts could work more effectively after 2002, when the Buddhist Council pledged its support. The Council circulated a letter to all the temples, stating its permission for the Department of Manuscripts to survey, catalog, and help conserve manuscripts in all temple collections.[52]

The pace of work in progress by the Department of Manuscripts has increased dramatically over the last ten years for two reasons. The first is that its collaboration with the Buddhist Council enabled it to work without resistance from individual temples. The second is that the Fine Arts Department's policies pushed the Department of Manuscripts to work more intensely from the late 1990s onwards — the period when manuscript specialists began to harbor serious concerns about huge manuscript losses through sale to foreigners.

There are cases of Japanese and other overseas purchasers acquiring manuscripts from rural areas to reproduce herbal medicinal recipes for merchandizing. This trade has had a direct negative impact on Chao Phraya Aphai Phubet Hospital, which is a leader in the production herbal Thai medicines. The hospital has concerns over competition from non-Thai companies, which have much greater funds than domestic investors. Supaporn Pitiporn, Head of the Department of Pharmacy at the hospital, warns that "the government needs to deal with this seriously . . . Otherwise we will lose the invaluable traditional knowledge kept in manuscripts".[53] It is evident that the manuscript trade continues today. At present, manuscripts for trade are either stolen or bought covertly from rural temples. Black-market hotspots lie in the north of Thailand and border areas connected to southern Shan regions and northern

Laos. These include Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, and Luang Prabang. Several antique shops in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai sell manuscripts. In the last five years, over-the-counter sales have been supplemented by online trading platforms.[54]

To monitor work in progress, the Department of Manuscripts had surveyed and cataloged manuscripts by 2014 in more than 33 provinces in upper and lower north, northeastern, central, western, eastern, and southern parts of Thailand. The total number of fascicles of palm-leaf manuscripts and paper manuscripts was estimated at more than 2 million. This figure can be broken down by region as follows.

- Bangkok: 650,000+ cataloged out of 850,000+ (estimated by survey); National Library in Bangkok (600,000+ items); other temples in Bangkok include Wat Bawon, Wat Sraket, Wat Rachathiwat, Wat Suthat, and Wat Arun.
- Northeast: 30,000+ cataloged out of 800,000+ (estimated by survey; more than 1 million according to the latest survey by Mahasarakham University); provinces include Sri Saket, Nakhon Ratchasima, Roi-et, Maha Sarakham, Yasothon, Mukdahan, Nakhon Phanom, and Buriram.
- Central and East: 10,000+ cataloged out of 200,000+ (estimated); provinces include Supanburi, Ayutthaya, Lopburi, Nonthaburi, Pathumthani, Chonburi, Chantaburi, and Rayong.
- North: 50,000+ cataloged out of 400,000+ (estimated); provinces include Phayao, Phetchabun, Kampaeng Phet, Nakhon Sawan, Sukhothai, Chiang Mai, Phrae, and Nan.
- South: 1,000+ cataloged out of 50,000+ (estimated); provinces include Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkhla.
- West: 5,000+ cataloged out of 50,000+ (estimated); provinces include Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Samut Prakan, and Samut Songkhram.

A casual conversation with Department of Manuscript staff around 2015 revealed that since the 1970s there have never been more than 10 manuscript specialists working for the department (excluding administrative staff). Their duties extend beyond looking after the manuscript collection at the National Library in Bangkok to surveying, cataloging, and follow-up activities relating to preservation and damage protection. More than half the department's workforce are former monks who are qualified in Pāli (Parian Dhamma 9, the highest Pāli grade, or a minimum of Parian Dhamma 5, a highly advanced level). The remainder are graduates in Thai and other Southeast Asian language programs or other relevant subjects, mainly from Silpakorn University. In addition to attractive remuneration, departmental staff are motivated by desire to contribute to a national drive to preserve manuscripts as important heritage artefacts and to carry out work that accrues Buddhist merits by preserving the Dhamma for future generations. The latter motivation is compatible with views on promoting Buddhist manuscripts culture, in which manuscripts are regarded as sacred in living Buddhist traditions.

The Department of Manuscripts recognizes that this is an impossible workload, so enlists assistance from Buddhist communities. Since 2014, they have trained monks and Buddhist supporters to help with surveys and cataloging. The department has organized such activities three or four times a year in collaboration with regional Sangha authorities. Programs raise manuscript awareness among monks and supporters at selected temples where the department carries out manuscript work. The Department of Manuscripts trains participants in such basic skills as cleaning, wrapping, and storage, and promotes manuscript preservation work as a merit-making activity to which Buddhist communities should contribute. Over the past three years, hundreds of monks, novices, and local supporters have participated in these training programs, spanning temples in Ratchaburi (west of Thailand), Nakhon Phanom (northeast), Phrae (north), and Nakhon Si Thammarat (south).

Of the temples at which the Department of Manuscripts has carried out work so far, Wat Sung Men in Phrae province in the upper north of Thailand has the largest manuscript collection and has been most successful in reviving Buddhist manuscript culture. One initiative by Wat Sung Men in 2007 was to revive the *Tak Tham* (drying Dhamma) ceremony. This event re-asserts the principle of accruing great merit by donating Buddhist manuscripts to the temple. Participants check, clean, sun-dry, circumambulate, and offer manuscripts on which they have actually worked. These actions accrue merit by preserving the Dhamma recorded in the manuscripts and paying homage to the living manuscript as a symbolic representation of Khruba Kañcana Araññavāsī (1789–1878), who was renowned for his meditation teachings and manuscript collection. During his lifetime, he collected thousands of manuscript fascicles from Luang Prabang, Chiang Mai, Lampang, Phrae, and Nan and brought them back to Wat Sung Men. According to Venerable Phramaha Suthit Apagaro, Head of the Buddhist Research Institute at Mahachulalongkorn University, this ceremony to honor Khruba Kañcana's tradition was practiced widely in Lan Na and upper parts of Laos until the early 19th century. Venerable Suthit recorded accounts of this ceremony by monks at Wat Sop Sikkharam in Luang Prabang (Wat Sung Men 2016, 2–7 and 10–13).

The success of this ceremony has gained national attention over the past few years. On March 11, 2013, Princess Sirindhorn visited the temple to offer congratulations for the success of its collaboration with Buddhist supporters and local communities, especially on manuscript work. She urged the temple to continue to promote the teaching of Lan Na, manuscript conservation and the *Tak Tham* ceremony (Wat Sung Men 2016, 2–7 and 11)

Another positive impact of Wat Sung Men's work is the expansion of its manuscript collection. The number of manuscripts in the temple collection increased from 8,845 fascicles in the 1970s to 9,835 in 2008 as a result of donations from Buddhist lay supporters (Srisakra and Songsiri

2008, 194–195). This is a unique track record; almost all temples in Thailand have actually lost manuscripts over the years. Wat Sung Men has become a role model for temple manuscript activities. Wat Sutthivararam and Wat Ratchasittaram in Bangkok and other temples are reviving Buddhist manuscript culture based on the Wat Sung Men model. Over the last decade, Wat Ratchasittaram's Venerable Phrakhrusangkharak Veera Thanaveero has promoted the preservation and study of manuscripts in relation to the meditation practices of the Supreme Patriarch Suk Kaithuen (1733–1822). Veera keeps Suk's manuscripts in his own residential area. This private archive of resources allows him teach his followers the significance of Suk's manuscripts, which link meditation, ritual, and living tradition.[55]

Several other institutions and organizations make important contributions manuscript work in Thailand. In the north, the Social Research Institute (SRI) of Chiang Mai University began important work on manuscripts in the 1980s under the leadership of Dr. M. R. Rujaya Abhakorn. The institute cataloged and microfilmed more than 4,000 manuscripts from 120 temples to create digital libraries in collaboration with Western scholars.

In the northeast, Mahasarakham University's Conservation Project for Northeastern Palm-leaf Manuscripts (CPNPM) has carried out significant manuscript work.[56] From 2003 to 2016, CPNPM and its university network surveyed manuscripts in six provinces: Mahasarakham, Roi-et, Kalasin, Khon Kaen, Chaiyaphum, and Yasothon. They identified 1,371,600 fascicles of palm-leaf manuscripts in 418 temples. Over the past 10 years, CPNPM has transliterated and translated more than 200 full texts (44 published). In 2015, it started digitization of manuscripts at temples in Mahasarakham, aiming for accessible online digital images within the next few years.[57]

The upper north and northeast Thailand lead the country in terms of manuscript work. No institution other than the Department of Manuscripts has carried out major work in Bangkok, the lower north, central, south, and east of Thailand. In August 2015, the Manuscript Conservation Association (MCA) was formed. In collaboration with the Buddhist Studies Group at King's College London, the association has digitized more than 10,000 manuscript fascicles over the past few years. Digitization is also ongoing at Wat Khao Kaeo in Nakhon Sawan province (upper central Thailand) and Wat Suthat, a royal temple in Bangkok. MCA has also cataloged manuscripts at important temples in Thonburi, such as Wat Arun (another royal temple) and Wat Ratchasittaram. The association's work has attracted national attention; more than 30 news features have reported its activities on television and radio and in the newspapers since late 2015. This boost to media presence has helped to focus public attention on manuscript culture.

Other institutions working on manuscript projects include the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC), SPAFA (SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts), Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Rajabhat, Songkhla Rajabhat, and the Dhammachai Tipitaka Project (DTP). Although this chapter only covers major work on cataloging and digitization, organizations have different areas of focus and expertise. SPAFA has worked on Mon manuscripts in Bangkok, Samutsakon, and Ratchaburi. DTP focuses on creating a digital database of Pāli Tipitaka manuscripts; it has digitized more than 8,000 manuscript items from 37 temples in 13 provinces in central, northern, and northeastern Thailand, as well as manuscripts in Burma, Sri Lanka, Laos, and Cambodia.[58] The Buddhist Research Institute of Mahachulalongkorn University is working in collaboration with Kyoto University, MCA, Chiang Mai University, and Chulalongkorn University to create a digital library of Sangha Declarations since 1902.

Almost one million palm-leaf fascicles and paper manuscripts have been cataloged in Thailand, although many need re-checking. However, most remain inaccessible to the public. More than 800 of 20,000 collections nationwide have been surveyed and cataloged. Although more than 5,500 texts (70,000 to 100,000 images) are now available online, this is a small proportion of the millions of extant manuscript fascicles. Only limited images of manuscripts from the upper north of Thailand plus Nakhon Pathom are currently available. Important royal palm-leaf collections remain inaccessible. Over the last few years, a few organisations have begun mass-digitization to create image databases with plans to make selected images available online. These institutions include the Buddhist Research Institute of Mahachulalongkorn University, the Manuscript Conservation Association, and the Dhammachai Institute. It may still take years for more materials to appear online.

There is also valuable work on Shan, Tai Lü, and other Tai manuscripts completed and underway overseas. Although outside the scope of this chapter, an interesting example is the catalog of the personal library of Phra Khamchan Virachitto (1920–2007), late Abbot of Wat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang. This project began as a dissertation by Bounleuth Sengsoulin and was subsequently part-funded by the Endangered Archive Programme of the British Museum. The catalog (Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016) lists 416 manuscripts in a variety of scripts: Lao variant of the Dhamma script, Old Lao or Lao Buhan script, Khòm, Lan Na, Tai Khün, Tai Lü, modern Thai, and modern Lao (Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016, 1–27).

## Challenges and obstacles

Manuscript work in Thailand has made impressive progress, especially in mass-cataloging at a national level. The three important institutions — the Department of Manuscripts (under the National Library, Fine Arts Department), Chiang Mai University, and Mahasarakham University — have been instrumental in making this happen. Through collaborations with non-Thai institutions, Chiang Mai University has made impressive progress toward the creation of digital libraries. In contrast, the huge database created by the Department of Manuscripts is still far from accessible.

Large collections in the West are in fact far smaller than even a medium-size collection in Thailand. However, Thai and non-Thai researchers alike gain greater benefits from Western digital libraries than through completed catalog work in Thailand, as the former are accessible online. The problem with Western collections is that many items are either uncataloged, unexplored, or misidentified. Western collections could benefit from the help of Thai scholars who have the skills to bridge these gaps.

The Department of Manuscripts and other institutions have engaged with Buddhist communities, despite much material being inaccessible. Such interaction has revived Buddhist manuscript culture and expedited manuscript work progress, especially during the last decade. Although most Buddhists prioritize Buddhism-related manuscripts, engagement with Buddhist communities benefits the preservation of both sacred and secular manuscripts. Although manuscript work has been conducted in around 800 out of a total of 20,000 temples by various institutions, a relatively small proportion of the total number of manuscripts in Thailand has been surveyed and cataloged. Work can be accelerated by increasing the number of active specialists and enlisting the help of Buddhist communities. In addition, promoting Buddhist manuscript culture more widely has a positive impact, as the psychological and religious aspects of this culture support work to preserve the manuscript heritage of Thailand.

Another factor retarding progress is the inadequate technological knowledge of most specialists. My own observations from 2014 to 2016 indicate limited communications and knowledge/skills transfer between the Thai and Western communities. Most Thai specialists are cognizant of Tai manuscripts in Britain and Germany, but have no awareness of progress with Western collections of Tai manuscripts and digital libraries. Similarly, most non-Thai scholars do not seem to know the status of work in Thailand — the progress of work, who is carrying it out, nor the approximate numbers of manuscripts in large collections held by branches of the National Library, Wat Arun, and other royal temples.

Language is a primary reason for the sparse exchange of knowledge and skills. Most Thai manuscript specialists have limited English ability, which hinders communications with non-Thai scholars. Moreover, most manuscript catalogs by Thai manuscript specialists have never been published, nor made publically available. There are two reasons for this: catalog publication is beyond the financial resources of most specialists and institutions; and, perhaps more importantly, conservative archivists believe that manuscript catalogs should not be published or made available without permission. Such archivists feel possessive of their institution's manuscripts and think that information access should be dependent on their personal permission. In practice, this is rarely given. Some institutions working on cataloging also prefer to keep data for proprietary use, rather than sharing in the public domain.

# Endnote: Contextualizing Tai Buddhist Manuscripts

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25eUDe2PB8I (accessed February 14, 2021). The English lyrics are a translated and edited version of the Thai song "Tears for palm-leaf manuscripts." For the Thai version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqywYPLNAT0 (accessed February 14, 2021) or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Shpc-8ll_Ng (accessed February 14, 2021).

2. The Association's aim is to promote the appreciation, understanding, safety and longevity of Thailand's rich manuscript heritage.

3. Full name Virin Varottamaphat.

4. Interview with Phrakhru Vibunsoraphan, the assisting abbot of Wat Sung Men, in December 2016. I only followed up on this during my fieldwork in 2016. I do not know if practitioners still gathered to perform the song from January 2017 onwards.

5. Personal research, 2015–2017. See also the section on "Manuscript Work in Thailand" below.

6. For example, digitization of 5,000 fascicles could take up to two and a half years. Speed relies on several factors: equipment, digitization method, the number of specialists, and the manuscript condition (Manuscript Conservation Association, 2015 to 2016).

7. For Buddhist manuscript culture, see also Grabowsky and Techasiriwan, research on Tai Lü communities, 2014, 8–20.

8. Khongdeum is a manuscript specialist working in the Department of Arts and Culture for Lamphang Rajabhat University and the Nation University, Thailand.

9. http://www.84000.org/tipitaka/book/nana.php?q=28 (accessed July 9, 2017). This widely used website provides references to the Pāli Canon and commentaries for general Thai readers. Well-known Buddhist scholar Sucheep Punyanuphab is the general editor.

10. According to the accounts of scholars from the late 19th century to the early 20th century (i.e. Prince Damrong), the Westerners paid less attention to the texts and their content when purchasing Siamese manuscripts, but rather focused on the fine/neat handwriting, beautiful illustrations, and decoration. Thus, artistic value was prioritized over textual value.

11. Special thanks to Silpsupa Jaengsawang, currently a postdoctoral researcher in Thai Studies at the University of Hamburg, for her help in providing this information on June 27, 2017.

12. For Henry Ginsburg's biography and work, see Igunma 2016, 22–81.

13. http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/asian-and-african/thai.html; accessed June 29, 2017.

14. Ibid; materials can be searched at http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP373.

15. http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/weston/our-work/projects/hidden-collections; accessed June 29, 2017.

16. Igunma 2016, 54–80. The approximate number of manuscript items at SOAS is based on my own research.

17. Personal communication with Peera Panarut (January 2020).

18. For more details on Tai manuscript collections in Italy, see Cicuzza 2016, 106–124.

19. https://www.matichon.co.th/news/260773 (accessed July 8, 2017).

20. Phibul 2015, 10. See also http://haab.catholic.or.th/churchbkk/25_thai- vatiku/thai-vatikun/thai-vatikun.html, "25 Years of Diplomatic Relationship between Thailand and the Vatican," Historical Archives Archdiocese of Bangkok (accessed June 10, 2017).

21. https://www.matichon.co.th/news/260773 (accessed July 8, 2017).

22. McDaniel identified 48 manuscripts at Chester Beatty in 2008 (Personal email communication with McDaniel on June 25, 2017). George Coedes identitfied 116 manuscripts in Copenhagen (Terwiel, undated).

23. Personal email communication with McDaniel on June 25, 2017.

24. For work on Thai/Tai manuscripts in Japan, Dublin and Denmark, see Unebe 2016, 151–73; McDaniel 2016, 174–201, and Terwiel (undated).

25. Several other private collections deserve further research.

26. Kerekes and McDaniel 2016, 208–20. Thai manuscripts at Cornell: http://handyincornell.blogspot.tw/2008/11/blog-post.html (accessed June 28, 2017).

27. 5,520 manuscripts are available online. DLNTM plan to upload more than 1,000 additional manuscripts (personal communication with David Wharton, July 2, 2017).

28. Personal communication with Associate Professor Jeerayut Chaiyajaruvanich, Lecturer in Computer Science at Chiang Mai University, February 2016.

29. Based on SAC website.

30. http://lannamanuscripts.net/en/about (accessed June 29, 2017).

31. http://library.cmu.ac.th/digital_collection/digitalheritage/index.php?Keyword=%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%A0%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%98%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%A1&Condition=&Field=TITLE (accessed June 29, 2017).

32. http://www.efeo.fr/Lan Na_manuscripts/node/437 (accessed June 29, 2017).

33. http://www.sac.or.th/databases/manuscripts/main.php?m=document&p=search&keyword=%E0 %B8%AD%E0%B8%A0%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%98%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%A1 (accessed June 29, 2017).

34. http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/search.html?fq=collection_facet%3A%22Thai+Manuscripts%22&q=abhidhamma (accessed June 29, 2017).

35. http://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/thai.html#list (accessed June 29, 2017)

36. Wat Sung Men's catalog of manuscripts created by Wat Sung Men, last revised in January 2016.

37. Personal communication with Wharton, July 2, 2017.

38. Number of temples by province: Chiang Rai 1,042, Chiang Mai 1,369, Mae Hong Son 142, Phrae 367, Nan 432, Lampang 733, Lamphun 429, and Tak 264; March 29, 2017, National Office of Buddhism website (http://www.onab.go.th/ข้อมูล-สถิติ/ฐานข้อมูล-สำนักพุทธฯ/บัญชีรายชื่อวัดทั่วประเทศ; accessed July 4, 2017).

39. Leepracha, Lipricha, and McCaskill 2008, 223; Choompolpaisal 2015, 5–6.

40. Phibul 2015, 5–6; Phibul, unpublished, Chapter 1. For the impact of political changes on Southeast Asian manuscripts, see Crosby 2014, 77–82.

41. Website of National Library of Thailand (http://www.nlt.go.th; accessed July 1, 2017).

42. Department of Manuscripts 2011, 2–5 and 13.

43. http://www.nlt.go.th/th/index.php (accessed July 1, 2017).

44. Research in progress.

45. Confidential personal communication with staff of the Department of Manuscripts, November 2016.

46. Thai Post News, October 30, 2014 (http://www.ryt9.com/s/tpd/2017915; accessed July 4, 2017).

47. Confidential interview, January 5, 2016.

48. Confidential interview, July 2016.

49. Interview with the Venerable Phra Jakkris Thitaviriyo, Wat Khaokaew, Nakhonsawan Province, May 2016.

50. Interview with Boonlert Senanon, former Head of Manuscript Section, National Library (August 2015).

51. Ibid.

52. Secretariat Office of Mahatherasamakhom 2002.

53. https://www.thaihof.org/main/artcile/detail/2018 (accessed 4 July 2017). See also http://www.manager.co.th/qol/viewnews.aspx?NewsID=9550000068327 (accessed 4 July 2017).

54. For example, a paper manuscript of a medical treatise was advertised for sale at 2,000 baht on the web link: https://lungthong.com/view_product.php?product=129948&cat_id=51 (accessed August 8, 2018). See also pictures in the song "Tears for palm leaf manuscripts" which include images of manuscripts for sale. Its English version is on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25eUDe2PB8I

(accessed February 14, 2021); and its Thai version on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Shpc-8Il_Ng (accessed February 14, 2021)" For the issue of selling manuscripts to non-Thais, see also http://www.manager.co.th/qol/viewnews.aspx?NewsID =9550000068327 (accessed 4 July 2017)

55. For the significance of Suk's manuscripts, see Phibul, forthcoming, 229–337.

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57. *Khao Sot*, June 5, 2016.

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# From Nan to Luang Prabang: The Buddhist Heritage of Northern Laos Reflected in Recently Discovered Manuscript Collections[1]

## VOLKER GRABOWSKY

The cultural and political significance for the Thai and Lao world of the small border province of Nan was long overlooked by Thai and international scholars. This changed thanks to the works of David K. Wyatt and Sarassawadee Ongsakul, who translated and transcribed different versions of the *Nan Chronicle* (*Phün müang nan*), and to Somjate Wimolkasem, who inscribed a precious mulberry-paper manuscript of an ancient law text, *Anachak lak kham*, from Nan as "Memory of the World." As a result, Nan is now known as the home of many Buddhist heritage sites, such as Wat Phrathat Chae Haeng, with a splendid history of its own.

During the 19th century, Müang Nan was one of the most important vassal states of Siam, equalling Chiang Mai and Luang Prabang.[2] Until the early 1890s, the territory of the autonomous kingdom of Nan was much larger than its present-day namesake province. It included territories that now belong to Phayao and Chiang Rai provinces and extended as far north as Wiang Phuka and Müang Sing in Laos, and Müang Len in the eastern Shan areas of Burma. Throughout the early Bangkok period, Nan's relationships with Luang Prabang and Phrae were stronger than with Chiang Mai and other *müang* in Western Lan Na.

In the 1830s, Khruba Kañcana Araññavāsī Mahā Thera (1789–1878), the Venerable Abbot of Wat Sung Men in Phrae, spent several years in

Nan and Luang Prabang. His objective was to copy Buddhist texts from thousands of palm-leaf fascicles to rebuild one of the largest and best-organized monastic repositeries in Thailand and mainland Southeast Asia.[3] Two inscriptions document Khruba Kañcana's endeavors. One is inscribed on a damaged stone slab kept at the provincial museum in Nan:

> จุลศักราชได้ ๑๑๙๕ ตัว ปีก่าไส้ ยังมีพระมหาเถรเจ้าตน ๑ ชื่อกัญจนะอรัญญวาสี (อยู่) เมืองแพร่ เป็นเค้า และศิษย์เจ้าทั้งมวล จรเดินเทศมาเมืองแพร่ หนปัจฉิมทิศ เข้าเถิงเมืองน่านที่นี่ แล้วจิ่งได้นำเอานาบุญขึ้นเทิงศรัทธาภายใน ภายนอกทั้งมวล
>
> ศรัทธาภายในมีพระสังฆเจ้าเมืองน่านที่นี่ ศรัทธาภายนอกมีเจ้าเมืองน่านที่นี่เป็นเค้า และอุปราชา ราชวงศ์ เจ้านายทั้งมวล พร้อมกันสร้างยังอักขระธรรมคัมภีร์ไตรปิฎกทั้งมวล ไว้โชตกพุทธศาสนา ๕๐๐๐ พระวรรษา แลสังรวมธรรมทังมวลอันได้สร้างนี้ เป็นธรรมร้อยปลาย ๔ สิบ ๒ มัด จัดเป็นผูกได้พันปลาย ๖ ร้อยปลาย ๓ ผูกแล . . .

In CS 1195 (1833/34), a *ka sai* year, there was a Venerable Abbot named Kañcana Araññavāsī at Müang Phrae along with all his disciples coming from Müang Phrae, which lies to the west, who arrived here in Müang Nan. He created a field of merit. The principal monastic and lay supporters [were as follows]:

The principal monastic supporter (*sattha phai nai*) was the Supreme Patriarch of Müang Nan. The principal lay supporters (*sattha phai nòk*) were the king of Müang Nan, along with the viceroy (*upalaca*), the *latcawong* and all noblemen (*cao nai*). They joined in copying a complete set of the *Tipitaka* (the Buddhist canon), illuminating the Teachings of the Buddha to last [until the end of] 5,000 years. The total set of the Dhamma Scriptures copied [literally: made] comprised 142 manuscript bundles (*mat*) or 1,603 palm-leaf fascicles (*phuk*).[4]

This depicts the highest religious dignatories, led by the Supreme Patriarch, hand in hand with the political leaders of the kingdom of Nan, headed by the King and the second- and third- highest-ranking princes. Together they celebrate the most meritorious endeavor of Khruba Kañcana Araññavāsī, the Venerable Abbot of Wat Sung Men, copying a complete set of the Buddhist canon for his home monastery in Phrae. Khruba Kañcana's activities to spread the Dhamma in Luang Prabang are celebrated similarly in the other inscription, engraved on a stone slate. It was discovered in Vat Vixun in Luang Prabang in 1887 and is currently kept in the monastery's main temple hall:

> จุลศักราชได้ ๑๑๙๘ ตัว ปีรวายสัน ยังมีพระมหาเถรเจ้าตนหนึ่งชื่อว่ากัญจนะอรัญญวาสี (อยู่ที่) เมืองแพร่ เป็นเค้า และศิษย์เจ้าทั้งมวลจรเดินเทศแต่เมืองแพร่ (ของไทย) ยวน หนปัจฉิมทิศ เข้ามาเถิงเมืองหลวงพระบางล้านช้างที่นี่ แล้วก็ได้นำเอานาบุญขึ้นเถิงเจ้าเมืองหลวงพระบางตนชื่อว่ามังธาเป็นเค้า และ (เจ้า) ราชวงศ์เมืองหลวงพระบางเป็นประธาน พร้อมกันสร้างยังอักขรธรรมคัมภีร์ไตรปิฎก ทั้งมวล ไว้โชตกพุทธศาสนา ๕๐๐๐ พระวรรษาแลได้ฉลอง (พระไตรปิฎกใหม่ในวันดังกล่าวคือ) ในเดือน ๔ เพ็ญ เม็ง (ว่า) วันอังคาร ไทย (ว่าวัน) ก่าไก๊ จิ่งแล้วบัวรมวลวันนั้นแล
>
> สังรอมธรรมทั้งมวลอันได้สร้างนี้ เป็นธรรมจำนวน ๒๔๒ มัด จัดเป็นผูกได้ ๒๘๕๒ ผูก จัดเป็นเงินค่าจ้างแต้มเขียน สมเด็จพระเป็นเจ้าเมืองหลวงพระบางมีเงิน ๘๕ ตั้ง เงินเจ้าราชวงศ์มีเงินลางหนัก ๑๘,๒๐๒ บาทปลาย ๗ ก่า ปลาย ๒ แดง เงินฝ่าย (เจ้า) ศรัทธาเมืองแพร่มีเงิน ๑ ชั่ง ๑๐ ตำลึงปลาย ๑๐ สลึง แต่คำปิ๋วพอกธรรมเสี้ยง ๑๒,๘๐๐ แผ่นแล (พระ) ธรรม (ที่) เจ้ามือสร้างเป็นธรรม ๓๔ มัด (พระ) ธรรม (ที่เจ้า) ราชวงศ์สร้างเป็นธรรม ๑๗๗ มัด (พระ) ธรรมที่เจ้าศรัทธาเมืองแพร่สร้าง เป็นธรรม ๓๑ มัดแล ...

> In CS 1198 (1836/37), a *rawai san* year, there was a Venerable Abbot named Kañcana Araññavāsī at Müang Phrae along with all his disciples coming from Müang Phrae [of the Tai] Yuan, which lies to the west, who arrived in Luang Prabang-Lan Xang. He took a field of merit to the ruler of Müang Luang Prabang whose name is

> Mangtha. The King and the *cao latcawong* of Luang Prabang were the principal lay supporters of the creation of [sponsors of the copying of] a complete set of the *Tipitaka*, illuminating the Teachings of the Buddha to last [until the end of] 5,000 years. [The finishing of the copying of this new set of the *Tipitaka*] happened on the full-moon day of the fourth lunar month, a Tuesday as the Mon say or a *ka kai* day as the Tai say.[5] Thus on that very day everything was accomplished.
>
> The total number of Buddhist scriptures copied is 2,852 [palm-leaf] fascicles (*phuk*) [organized] in 242 bundles (*mat*). The King of Luang Prabang paid a total of 85 *tang* as remuneration for the scribes, the *latcawong* paid [as remuneration] 18,202 *bat*, 7 *ka* and 2 *daeng*. Religious faithful from Müang Phrae paid 1 *chang*, 10 *tamlüng* and 10 *salüng*. For sealing the palm-leaf fascicles a total of 12,800 gold leaves were spent. The Buddhist scriptures which the King made comprised 34 bundles, those which the *latcawong* made comprised 177 bundles, and those which the lay supporters made comprised 31 bundles.[6]

Note that the main contribution did not come from King Mangtha (Manthathurat; r. 1817–1836), but from the *latcawong* — the third-highest-ranked figure in the political hierarchy of the Luang Prabang kingdom — who sponsored the copying of almost three-fourths of the 242 manuscript-bundles. The remainder was divided between the King and Buddhist lay supporters from Phrae.

This was an unprecedented endeavor by Khruba Kañcana, spreading the Dhamma in his home principalty of Phrae with the support of the religious and secular communities of Nan and Luang Prabang. It underscores the close, even intimate, relationship between the two *müang* (although nowadays they belong to two different nation-states).

Luang Prabang is a beautiful town, situated at the confluence of the Mekong and Khan rivers. It has made significant contributions to the preservation of the Dhamma, the precious Teachings of the Buddha.

A unique collection of Buddhist documents has been unearthed through various projects since 2005, culminating in the foundation of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang 10 years later.

## The Buddhist archives of Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang, the former royal capital of Laos, has always been the centre of Lao Buddhism. Traditional Buddhist practices and monastic organization have persisted here more tenaciously than in other places, withstanding the manifold challenges posed by French colonialism, Marxist ideology, and capitalist consumerism throughout the 20th century.[7] Despite the town's relative geographical isolation, monks in Luang Prabang made early use of modern photographic technologies to document important Buddhist rituals and ceremonies and daily life in the monasteries. The Buddhist Archives has collected more than 35,000 photos from 19 monastic archives, documenting more than 120 years of monastic life (1880–2006), as well as rituals, ceremonies, pilgrimages, portraits of monks and novices, and varied social activities. The collection, preservation, and digitization of these photographs between 2007 and 2011 was supported by a generous grant from the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme (for the discovery and historical significance of the photo collections, see Berger 2015).

The Buddhist Archives would not have been possible without Pha Khamchan Virachitto (1920–2007), abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam for 58 years. He was an outstandingly charismatic monk and an enthusiastic collector of photographs, athough he never took the camera into his own hands. In 1993, Pha Khamchan Virachitto met German photographer, artist and writer, Hans Georg Berger, who had embarked on a community project to document monastic life in Luang Prabang through photography. In 1996, the Venerable Abbot Vat Saen Sukharam invited him to his *kuti* (monastic abode) to show him his most precious photo albums. Ten years later, when the Venerable Abbot sensed death approaching, he asked Hans Georg Berger to preserve his collection for posterity. If he had not done so, these historical photographs may well have been cremated with their former owner (Berger 2015, 107–113).

Vientiane has been heavily exposed to Thai — and later Western – influences; Luang Prabang represents Lao Buddhism par excellence to this day. The physical presence of the monarchy and the state administration ensured that both Sangha and laity remained connected to "grand policy" at an international level. This explains why Buddhist monks in Luang Prabang turned to such modern technologies as photography at an early date to document Buddhist ceremonies, rituals, and monastic life.

Photography was taken up by Lao monks in the late 19th century — this revolutionary technology reached remote Indochina within a few decades of its invention. The extensive photographic corpus, unique for Southeast Asia, documents a critical century for Laos: French colonialism, foreign intervention, civil wars, the royal court, revolution, socialism, and finally globalization. The Indian tradition of *darshan* — belief in the reciprocity of beholding images — explains why Lao abbots so tenaciously protected these large collections of photographs; their existence was only known to a small inner circle (Berger 2015, 123–127, cf. Berger 2006 and 2013).

After Pha Khamchan Virachitto's death in 2007, his *kuti* was opened to reveal thousands of documents, personal letters, and official papers that the Venerable Abbot had collected over half a century. Permission to open two additional cupboards was granted several years later by Pha One Keo Sitthivong,[8] abbot of Vat Pak Khan and Vat Xiang Thòng and one of Pha Khamchan Virachitto's closest disciples. This trove of valuable historical items included several hundred palm-leaf manuscripts and leporello mulberry-paper manuscripts (see Bounleuth 2015, and 2016). It must be emphasized that these manuscripts were not part of the monastic library (*hò tham*) of Vat Saen Sukharam; this was the abbot's personal collection of books and documents. His hoard included printed books, pamphlets, grey literature (internal documents of the Sangha used for religious and political teachings), and even religious, cultural, and political magazines from the 1950s to the early 1970s. These derived from Vat Saen Sukharam and a number of other prominent monasteries, such as Vat Suvannakhili, Vat Xiang Thòng, Vat Mai (the former seat of the Supreme Patriarch), Vat Xiang Muan, and Vat Maha That. I estimate the number of printed materials to be 1,500–2,000 items, of which more than 80% are kept at Vat Saen Sukharam (the largest single collection) and at Vat Suvannakhili. More than two-thirds of the items are from the French colonial period (1893–1953) and the Kingdom of Laos (1953–1975). Almost half of the pre-1975 printed materials were written in Thai language and published in Thailand, reflecting the close relationship between monks in Luang Prabang and the monastic networks in neighboring Thailand. The trial of Phra Phimonlatham (1903–1989),[9] abbot of Vat Mahathat Yuvarajarangsarit, during the regime of staunchly anti-communist Thai Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat was closely followed by Luang Prabang monks. This is evidenced by many related pamphlets and monographs found at various monasteries in Luang Prabang.

## Luang Prabang manuscript collections

The vast majority of books and pamphlets in the Luang Prabang archives are religious in nature, but the abbots also collected material related to politics, social issues, natural sciences, law, secular literature, philology, and astrology. Of special importance are notebooks kept by some leading abbots as diaries or records of administrative matters.

Most of the 1,200 personal letters at Vat Saen Sukharam were sent by Buddhists, both monks and laypersons, to the Venerable Abbot, Pha Khamchan Virachitto. The correspondence starts from 1947, when he became abbot, and continues for almost 60 years, until his death in 2007. However, a few letters were written by Pha Khamchan himself: copies of letters that the abbot wrote to high-ranking monks or state officials and unsent letters to laypersons. The content usually pertains to private matters, sometimes responses to requests for personal advice from laypersons. A large number of Lao laypeople fled to foreign countries after 1975; it is amazing to see how many of them maintained contact with Pha Khamchan over large distances and extended periods of time. The collection provides insights into living conditions for Lao refugees in Thailand, the United States, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, and other countries.[10]

More than 4,800 administrative documents kept in Pha Khamchan's *kuti* are of immense value for understanding the organizational structure of the Sangha, its relationship with the state prior to and after the socialist revolution, and the social history of Luang Prabang. Vat Saen Sukharam and many other monasteries recorded detailed census results from the 1950s onwards. They list the names of monks and novices, their ages at ordination, durations in the monkhood, and their villages of origin, in addition to family data, social background, and sometimes ethnicity.[11]

The greatest treasure bequeathed by Pha Khamchan Virachitto is his personal collection of more than 400 palm-leaf and mulberry-paper manuscripts, which were housed in Western-style cabinets. Additional manuscripts were stored in the ordination hall (*sim*, สิม), the temple sermon hall (*sala hong tham*, ศาลาโรงธรรม), and the museum (*phiphithaphan*, พิพิธภัณฑ์). The surprising variety of modern publications and printed materials in Pha Khamchan Virachitto's collection was built up for his personal use over half a century; these may have influenced the content of other manuscripts.[12] His abode was a cache of both religious and secular knowledge.

Preservation measures were not taken as quickly as they should have been following Pha Khamchan Virachitto's death in 2007. Some manuscripts were damaged by the humid climate of South and Southeast Asia, marred by "stains and spots, discolouration of the ink, insect damage, damage due to fungus, loss of flexibility, [and] splitting of the various layers of the palm-leaves" (Agrawal 1982, 85). Manuscript collections from Vat Saen Sukharam, and similar collections in several other monasteries have been inventoried, documented, and digitized through a project named "Rare manuscripts of great Buddhist thinkers of Laos: Digitization, translation and relocation at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang" (EAP 691; see https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP691).

The final phase of the project was supported by the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme from February 2015 until July 2016. The initial survey in late March 2016 revealed that a substantial number of manuscripts from this corpus were donated by abbots and monks of neighboring Vat Si Mungkhun, by monks from other monasteries, and by laypeople of the surrounding communities. Donors included the nobility of Luang Prabang and even the King of Luang Prabang and members of the royal family. Although several manuscripts are from the late 18th century and early 19th century, the majority date from the first half of the 20th century. The predominence of scribes, sponsors, and donors associated with Vat Si Mungkhun suggests that these manuscripts were originally kept in the monastic library (*hò tai*) of Vat Si Mungkhun. Nowadays, this is used as a monk's dormitory (*kuti*) and no longer contains any manuscripts. Subsequently, these manuscripts were inexplicably transferred from Vat Si Mungkhun's library.

There are 541 manuscripts and a total of 861 fascicles (*phuk*) in the Vat Si Bun Hüang (VSB) collection (the corpus of VSB is elaborated in detail in Khamvone and Grabowsky 2017). Two-thirds (353) of these manuscripts are dated, and one-third (188) are undated.[13] The oldest accurately dated piece in the VSB collection is a fragment of the *Nagarakhaṇḍa*, the 13th and final section (*kaṇḍa*) of *Vessantara Jātaka* (BAD-21-1-0485); the date of writing completion corresponds to Thursday September 5, 1799. Two older extant manuscripts are less-reliably dated: BAD-21-1-0477, which contains a *Maha Vibak* (Great Retribution) text, bears a less-precise and somewhat contradictory date of January 1783; BAD-21-1-0478, which contains a *Vohāra* text, is dated with greater certainty via a colophon indicating Thursday October

12, 1662, as the date the scribe finished writing. The most recent VSB manuscript is from 1982, so the entire collection spans 320 years. These manuscripts were inventoried, cataloged, and digitized between October 2016 and August 2017 through a project supported by the Centre for the Studies of Manuscript Cultures in Hamburg (CSMC).

Vat Xiang Thòng, probably the most famous monastery in Luang Prabang, is visited by hundreds of thousands of Lao and overseas tourists every year. In 2014, a survey was conducted of manuscripts in Luang Prabang monasteries in preparation for EAP 691. The Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang research team discovered a large collection of manuscripts in Vat Xiang Thòng, stored in eight wooden boxes (*hip tham*) in the storage room of a monk's *kuti*. These manuscripts had been kept in the abbot's living quarters for decades and were moved to the *kuti* when the abbot's abode was renovated in 2013. They had not been inventoried by the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme during the 1990s. Shortly after the discovery, the team started preservation work: classifying, arranging, and wrapping the manuscripts. The manuscripts were moved in 2015 to the beautiful temple hall (*sala*) next to the *kuti*. In July 2016, the Buddhist Archives were granted permission by the abbot of Vat Xiang Thòng to house the manuscripts temporarily in the Buddhists Archives for documentation and digitization.

Research showed that the manuscripts had been collected and used by the late abbot, Sathu Nyai Mao Manivangsa Maha Thela (1921–2001), during the second half of the 20th century. At least five manuscripts were sponsored by the abbot himself. A photograph from the Vat Pak Khan collection depicts the Venerable Abbot teaching one of his novices. This provides factual evidence that the Venerable Abbot used the manuscripts to preach to laypeople during Buddhist ceremonies and that he also taught his disciples to study and use the manuscripts. A number of manuscripts from this corpus come from Vat Pak Khan, where Sathu Nyai Mao was a monk until 1940. So the Venerable Abbot probably moved the manuscripts from Vat Pak Khan to Vat Xiang Thòng for security reasons, particularly as Vat Pak Khan was without an abbot at that time. He was empowered to do this because Vat Pak Khan was later placed under his supervision.

The corpus of registered manuscripts kept at the abbot's abode in Vat Xiang Thòng comprised 637 palm-leaf manuscripts with a total of 735 fascicles (*phuk*), as well as five mulberry-paper manuscripts. The dated manuscripts cover a period of more than two and a half centuries (1724–1983). Of this total, 519 palm-leaf manuscripts and 5 paper manuscripts were inventoried, cataloged, and digitized between September 2017 and February 2018 with the support of the CSMC in Hamburg. The remainder were printed in the Thai script on palm leaf, so fell beyond the scope of digitization and cataloging through this project. Note that these manuscripts were not eligible for the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme during the 1990s, as inventory and documentation was restricted to the monastic library (*hò trai*) of Vat Xiang Thòng (for details of the Vat Xiang Thòng collection, see Khamvone and Grabowsky 2018).

By far the largest corpus of manuscripts that has been digitized consists of 1,500 manuscripts from Wat Maha That, one of the most ancient Luang Prabang monasteries. The monastery, built for King Saysetthathirat and completed in May 1548, is a focal point for major festivals of the Buddhist calendar and for the preservation of Luang Prabang's Buddhist heritage. During the Lao New Year festival, this monastery is the starting point for the traditional *hae vò* (palanquin procession) to Vat Xiang Thòng. In February 2017, the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang manuscript project research team visited the monastic library at Vat Maha That, located to the right of the temple hall (*sim*), to examine the manuscripts. Most were still in good physical condition, but the contents of a number of boxes were damaged by insects, some of them severely, and many manuscripts were in a state of disorder. Moreover, few manuscripts had inventory numbers, indicating that they had not been processed by the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme run by the National Library and supported by the German Foreign Ministry in the 1990s. This was probably because these manuscripts were kept in the abbot's *kuti* and used exclusively by Sathu Nyai Phui Thirachitta Maha Thela (1925–2005), an intellectual monk and abbot of Wat Maha That. Digitization of this large corpus, in a precarious state since the death of the Venerable Abbot, has been supported by the Digital Repository of Endangered and Affected Manuscripts in Southeast Asia (DREAMSEA) from September 2018 until May 2019.

The personal manuscript collection of Pha Khamchan Virachitto, kept in his living quarters, contained a high proportion of multiple-text manuscripts, in particular mulberry-paper folded books — a rarity in the Vat Xiang Thòng collection. Several typical secular texts are absent from this collection, for example customary law texts, philological and astrological treatises, and, other than a few folk tales (*nithan*), texts from the broader field of secular literature. Texts related to white magic (*sainyasat*), rites and rituals (*phithikam*), and medical treatises (*tamla ya*) are also scarce. The collection contains several dozen chronicles, almost all of which are "Buddhist chronicles" (*tamnan phutthasatsana*).

A significant number of manuscripts from Vat Xiang Thòng (139) contain texts from the Pāli canon, so belong to the categories of *Vinaya*, *Suttanta* or *Abhidhamma*. Popular *Jātaka* stories, dealing with the previous lives of the Buddha, are equally repesented. The large number of such texts on palm leaf suggests that the *Jātaka* stories, dealing with the previous lives of the Buddha, are popular among the Lao people of Luang Prabang. *Vessantara Jātaka* is the most popular *Jātaka* story. It depicts Buddha's incarnation immediately before he was born as Siddhattha Gotama. The compassionate primary character, Prince Vessantara, gives away everything he owns, including his children, thereby displaying the virtue of perfect generosity (*dana*). It is also known as the *Thet Mahasat* (Great Birth Sermon), and is familiar to Lao Buddhists as *Phavet* or *Phavetsandòn*. Bun Phavet is a traditional festival that is held around the fourth lunar month of the year. The festival lasts two or three days, and the story of Prince Vessantara is recited throughout the final day.

The story is in verse form, comprising 13 chapters or *kan* (kaṇḍa). It is chanted by novices and veteran monks, preaching all of the chapters. The text combines Pāli words and phrases with the respective Lao translations.[14] According to tradition, three chapters (*Himmaphan*, *Thanakhan* and *Kumman*) are divided into two volumes each, so the story of Prince Vessantara is written on 16 palm-leaf fascicles. However, many *Jātaka* manuscripts in the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection contain only 1 of the 13 *kan*, not the complete text.

Besides the *Jātaka* tales (100 manuscripts), 69 manuscripts in the Vat Xiang Thòng collection feature *Anisong* (Pāli: *ānisaṃsa*) texts.[15] (*Anisong* texts are generally known as *Salòng* or *Sòng* in Lao.)[16] These short homiletic texts are often inscribed on palm leaf as well as on mulberry and other kinds of paper, and rarely contain more than 20 folios. They are used to perform or preach sermons through a storyline that showcases the rewards of merit, or literally the "advantage" that a believer may expect to receive from performing a particular religious deed. Surprisingly, manuscript collections also include titles referring to non-Buddhist rituals, such as the marriage ceremony (*Anisong taeng ngan*), which is outside the auspices of monks in this region of Southeast Asia. *Anisong* can be seen as a paradigm of "Buddhization by means of text," that is, the legitimization of a given practice by its written record in sacred script (Dhamma script[17]) on a sacred object (manuscript). In this way, any local custom is unquestionably "Buddhist" if it is included in *Anisong* (for further details on this aspect, see Silpsupa 2019; cf. her chapter in this volume).

**Table 1: Texts in the Vat Xiang Thòng collection by genre**

| Genre | หมวด | no. of fascicles | in percent | no. of manuscripts | in percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General Buddhism | ธรรมะทั่วไป | 2 | 0.4 | 2 | 0.4 |
| *Vinaya* rules | พระวินัย | 25 | 4.4 | 25 | 4.8 |
| *Suttanta* doctrine | พระสูตร | 117 | 20.6 | 109 | 20.4 |
| *Abhidhamma* doctrine | พระอภิธรรม | 8 | 1.4 | 5 | 1.0 |
| Buddhist tales | นิยายธรรมะ | 43 | 7.6 | 43 | 8.3 |
| *Jātaka* tales | ชาดก | 125 | 22.0 | 100 | 19.1 |
| Prayers | บทสวดมนต์ | 35 | 6.2 | 35 | 6.7 |
| *Anisong* (blessings) | อานิสงส์ | 70 | 12.3 | 69 | 13.2 |
| Rites and rituals | พิธีกรรม | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 |
| Monolingual Pali | คัมภีร์บาลี | 5 | 0.9 | 4 | 0.8 |
| Buddhist chronicles | ตำนานพุทธศาสนา | 72 | 12.7 | 69 | 13.2 |
| Secular chronicles | ตำนานเมือง | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 |
| Customary law | กฎหมาย | - | - | - | - |
| Didactics | คำสอน | 33 | 5.8 | 32 | 6.1 |
| Medical treatises / White Magic | ตำรายา / ไสยศาสตร์ | 19 | 3.3 | 19 | 3.6 |
| Folktales | นิทาน | - | - | - | - |
| (Secular) Literature | วรรณคดี | 10 | 1.8 | 7 | 1.3 |
| Proverbs | คำสุภาษิต |  |  | 1 | 0.2 |
| Astrology | โหราศาสตร์ |  |  | 1 | 0.2 |
| Miscellaneous | หลายหมวด | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 |
| Total | **รวมทั้งหมด** | **569** | **100** | **524** | **100** |

## Contents of the colophons

Colophons reveal a lot more than dates about manuscript production, purpose, and usage. They appear at the end of manuscripts sometimes in smaller text separated from the main text by a blank line or on the recto of an additional folio. Hundius (1990) asserts that Tai-Lao manuscript tradition lacks clear distinction between writer and copyist. Lao manuscripts usually use the terms *phu taem*, *phu khian*, and *phu litchana*[18] to denote the scribe, who refers to himself as *kha* (serf [of the Buddha]). A number of colophons also mention a *phu sang*, literally the "maker" of the manuscript.

This corpus includes 28 manuscripts with scribal colophons. The vast majority of colophons (323) express the wishes of sponsors and donors. Few manuscripts have colophons that are exclusively scribal;[19] many record the names of both scribe and manuscript sponsor and donator to the Sangha. In general, the intentions in making the donation and the wishes expressed in the colophons pertain to the principal monastic or lay supporters — the religious faithful (*mūlasaddhā*)[20] who made production of the manuscript possible (von Hinüber 2013, XLVIff).

The three universal wishes evenly distributed over all time periods are: that writing the manuscript will eventually lead to *nibbāna* (to "the splendid city, the peak of *nibbāna*"); that it will bring merit (*puñña*) or rewards of merit (*phala ānisaṃsa*), for the writer, the sponsor, the donor, his family, and other people; and that copying, sponsoring, and donating to the Sangha will be a support (*kamchu*) for the Teachings of the Buddha (*sāsana*) to last its full term of 5,000 years. This figure is calculated from the Buddha entering *parinibbāna* (Veidlinger 2006, 164–165) on the premise that Buddha's Teachings will reach complete degeneration after 5,000 years —a widespread belief among the Tai and Lao. The intent of sponsor and donor to extend the lifespan of Buddhism is expressed as a standard phrase in almost all longer colophons and most shorter ones. However, the wish to be reborn in the age of Buddha Metteyya (Ariya Maitreya) is restricted to a handful of colophons and freely expressed in Lao vernacular (the first two examples below) or in Pāli (the last two examples):

- May [we] be born in the period of the Buddha named Ariya Metteyya. (ขอได้เกิดพร้อมพระเจ้าตนชื่อว่าอริยเมตไตรย) (BAD-17-1-0327, dated January 23, 1818)

- May I be born in the period of the Teachings of the future Enlightened One named Ariya Metteyya. May I be ordained [as a monk] to gain perfection under the guidance of Pha Ariya Metteyya and then achieve arahantship under Pha Ariya Metteyya. May I receive the royal gift and listen to the preaching of Pha Ariya Metteyya. (ขอให้ผู้ข้าได้ร่วมในศาสนาพระพุทธเจ้าตนจักลงมาตรัสสัพพัญญูภายหน้าตนชื่อว่าอริยเมตไตรยเจ้า ขอให้ผู้ข้าได้บวชสร้างบารมีในสำนักพระอริยเมตไตรยเจ้า ขอให้ผู้ข้าได้รับพระราชทานฟังพระธรรมเทศนาของพระอริยเมตไตรยเจ้าแล้วขอให้ผู้ข้าได้เป็นพระอรหันต์ตน ๑ ตนละองค์พระอริยเมตไตรยเจ้านั้น) (BAD-17-1-0173)
- *Nibbāna paccayo hotu me metteyya santike niccaṃ dhuvaṃ dhuvaṃ.* (May this be a condition to reach Nibbāna at the residence of [Ariya] Metteyya, continuously and forever; นิพฺพาน ปจฺจโย โหตุ เม เมตฺเตยฺย สนฺติเก นิจฺจํ ทุวํ ทุวํ) (BAD-17-1-0366, dated December 2, 1812)
- *Ayaṃ me dānaṃ hontu me metteyya sanike yāva nibbānaṃ sukhaṃ hontu me.* (May this donation be a condition for me to meet Metteyya, bringing me the happiness of *Nibbāna;* อยํ เม ทานํ โหนฺตุ เม เมตฺเตยฺย สนฺติเก ยาว นิพฺพานํ สุขํ โหนฺตุ เม) (BAD-17-1-0440, dated October 9, 1971)

## Table 2: Contents of colophons

| | | BAD-17-1-0375 | BAD-17-1-0436 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Era | | CS 1276 | BE 2516 |
| Lunar calendar | Year | *kap nyi* (Year of the Tiger) | *ka pao* (Year of the Ox) |
| | Month | 7th lunar month | 3rd lunar month |
| | Fortnight | 3rd waning day | 12th waning day |
| | Day of the week | 5th day of the week (Thursday) | 2nd day of the week (Monday) |
| | Zodiac day | *poek si* | – |
| | Corresponding to | Thursday June 11, 1914 | Monday February 4, 1974 |
| Time | | – | *nyam kòng laeng* (time of the sunset drum, 13:30–15:00) |
| Initiator | Scribe | Phummapannya (monk) | Bhikkhu Sukhapaññā |
| | Sponsor/donor | Phummapannya (monk) and elder sister (procuring the palm leaves) | Buddhist layman Nai Vaen and his wife Sao Nang from Ban Pak Lao (town quarter) |
| Title | | *Sòng sangkhan* (Benefits from sponsoring New Year celebrations) | *Akalavattasutta* |
| Objective | | To ensure the continuation of Buddhism over 5,000 *vassa* (rains/retreats) | To ensure the continuation of the Teachings of the Buddha until the end of 5,000 years |
| Wish | | May this merit support our parents, brothers, sisters and all relatives. If they were exposed to suffering, may they move to a good place. If they are already in a good place they should move to an even better place, thus one hundred shall be equivalent to one thousand, and ten thousand [shall be equivalent] to one hundred thousand, definitely. | May we gain only happiness and prosperity as our wishes, definitely. |
| Concluding phrase (in Pāli) | | *Nibbāna paccayo hontu no* (May this be a condition for us to reach Nibbāna.) | *Idaṃ dhammadānaṃ nibbāna paccayo hontu* (May my dhamma-gift be a condition to reach Nibbāna.) |

The length of the colophons varies considerably. Many colophons are short, providing only the date when the (often unnamed) scribe completed writing the manuscript, followed by a brief plea that the merit gained from the making and donating of the manuscript will support the Teachings of the Buddha (*phuttha-satsana*) for the prescribed 5,000 years. Other colophons are relatively long, possibly running over more than one side of a palm leaf. Basic information includes the date, the names of scribe and principal sponsor, an outline of the motives and intentions for making the manuscript, and the aspirations of the scribe or sponsor/donor for the results of the acquired merit. Some longer colophons also contain personal expressions, including biographical details. Two sample colophons from different periods and with sponsors/donors from different social backgrounds are analyzed and compared in Table 2.

One of the most interesting records of wishes and aspirations of a sponsor/donor is the unusually long colophon of manuscript BAD-17-1-0221, entitled *Maha munlanipphan* (Pāli: *Mahā Mūlanibbāna Sutta*). The principal initiator and main sponsor of this manuscript was a laywoman named Sao (Ms.) Suk, from the town quarter of Ban Khili in peninsular Luang Prabang. She dedicated it to a *chao ku*, a deceased person the donor had harmed in a previous life who threatens to return in this or a future life to take revenge. Donating a palm-leaf manuscript bearing a famous Sutta text and offering gifts to the *chao ku* invites redemption from this looming harassment. The manuscript, dated April 18, 1942, states in its colophon (folio 40 recto and verso):

> จุลศักราช ๑๙๔๒ ตัว (ปี) เต่าซะ (สะ) ง้า เดือน ๖ ออกใหม่ ๑๔ ค่ำ วัน ๓ รจนาแล้วยามกองงาย หมายมีสาวสุข บ้านคีรี มีใจใสศรัทธา สร้างหนังสือมหามูล (นิพพาน) ผูกนี้ ทานไปหาพระยากำเจ้า อันผู้ข้าได้ปะได้ปานไว้แก่พระยากำเจ้านั้น บัดนี้ ผู้ข้าก็ได้กระทำมาแล้วยังเครื่องกิริยาบูชาทั้งหลายฝูงนี้ ผู้ข้าก็นำมาแก้มาไขมาบูชาเจ้ากู ให้เจ้ากูจงเสด็จลงมาโจมรับจับเอายังเครื่องกิริยาบูชาของผู้ข้านี้ มีหนังสือมหามูลนิพพานผูก ๑ กับทั้งข้าวตอกดอกไม้ และข้าวน้ำโภชนาอาหารหลายประการต่างๆ ทุกเยื่องพร้อมมาๆ ขอให้เจ้ากูจงเสด็จลงมาในกาลเดี่ยวนี้ด้วยเทอญ ผู้ข้าชื่อว่าสาวสุข ได้ปะพระยาเจ้ากำนั้น บัดนี้ผู้ข้าขอมาแก้มาไขเสียในกาลบัดเดี่ยวนี้เทอญ ประการหนึ่งครั้นว่าเจ้ากูมารับเอายังเครื่องทั้งหลายฝูงนี้แล้ว ขอให้เจ้ากูจงโปรดผู้ข้านี้

กระทำชำระโพยภัย กล่าวคือว่าพยาธิโรคา สรรพสิ่งอันตรายภายในและภายนอก ขอกขันธสันดานในตนตัวของผู้ข้านี้ชื่อว่าสาวสุขนี้แดเทอญ ประการหนึ่ง ขอให้ผู้ข้ามีอายุมั่นยืนยาว ได้ร้อยชาวขวบเข้าให้มั่นเที่ยงเท่าทีมาแดก็ข้าเทอญ ขอให้เจ้ากูรับเอา แล้วจงให้ผู้ข้านี้มีอายุมั่นยืนยาวได้ร้อยชาวพันวัสสาแดก็ข้าเทอญ นิพฺพานํ ปรมํ สุขํ

In 1942, a *tao sanga* year, the fourteenth waxing day of the sixth [lunar] month, the third day of the week,[21] the writing was finished at the time of the morning drum (*nyam kòng ngai*). Sao Suk [from] Ban Khili village had the religious faith to sponsor the making of this manuscript entitled *Maha munla[nipphan]* to dedicate it as a benefit for *phaya kam chao* to whom I made an oath. Now I have prepared these offerings to fulfill [the oath for] *chao ku*. May *chao ku* come down and receive my offerings including this *Maha munlanipphan* manuscript, popped rice, flowers, rice, water, food, and other miscellaneous things. May *chao ku* come down right now. I, Sao Suk, made an oath with *phaya chao kam*. Now may I fulfil [the oath]. On the one hand, if *chao ku* receives these offerings, may *chao ku* help me to clear all of the dangers that are diseases and various kinds of dangers, both inside and outside of the physical and mental bodies of mine, whose name is Sao Suk. Moreover, may I have the longivity to live for one hundred and twenty years, exactly. May *chao ku* receive my offerings and help me to have longevity of one hundred and twenty thousand years. *Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*. (Nibbāna is the highest state of happiness.)

## Scribes, sponsors, and donors

Only a small number of colophons in the 524 manuscripts of the Vat Xiang Thòng corpus record the names of scribes. The vast majority state that the writing was accomplished by a certain date, directly followed by the names of the leading and initiating monastic and lay supporters (*mūla-saddhā*) and their intentions in sponsoring the manuscript. Only 28 colophons explicitly mention the scribe's name and in 10 cases their affiliation to a certain monastery, village, or town quarter. Three-fifths of identified scribes were members of the Sangha (abbots, monks, and in some cases novices). Two-fifths of the scribes were laymen, four were referred to as *achan* (learned man) or the shortened form *chan*. Most other lay scribes were former monks (*thit* or *khanan*) or novices (*xiang*).

Most colophons prominently mention the names of the leading monastic and lay supporters (*mūlasaddhā*) who commissioned the making of manuscripts. Their intentions and wishes are also recorded. If the scribe's name appears, it is clearly of secondary importance. In the colophon of BAD-17-1-0288, for example, the mother of a women called I (Ms.) Chanthi dedicated the manuscript of an *Anisong* text entitled *Sòng thung lek* (Benefits derived from making an iron flag) to her deceased daughter to ensure that the resulting benefits would positively impact her daughter's rebirths. The scribe, a monk, humbly expresses his own wish in the final sentence: "Chao Mòm (monk) Tan was the scribe. May I get a large share of the merit." (เจ้าหม่อมตันเป็นผู้รจนา ขอส่วนผลบุญนำหลายๆ แด่ทอน). A few manuscripts have separate colophons for scribe and donor, although both were written by the scribe. The colophon of manuscript BAD-17-1-0402, which contains an *Anisong* text describing the benefits derived from the distribution of rice, leads with a one-line scribal colophon on folio 7 verso:

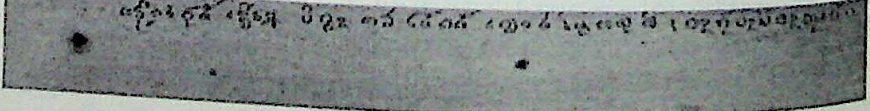

**Figure 1:** BAD-17-1-0402, folio 7 (verso).

> แรม ๔ ค่ำ วัน ๕ เดือน ๘ ปีชวด พ.ศ. ๒๕๑๕ เวลา ๔ โมงแลงแล จารย์พัน บ้านสีถานเขียนเน้อ

> On the fourth waning day of the eighth [lunar] month, the fifth day of the week in the year of the rat, BE 2515, [the writing was finished] at 4 pm. Chan Phan from Ban Sithan was the scribe.

The colophon of the sponsor/donor is inscribed on the recto side of folio 8:

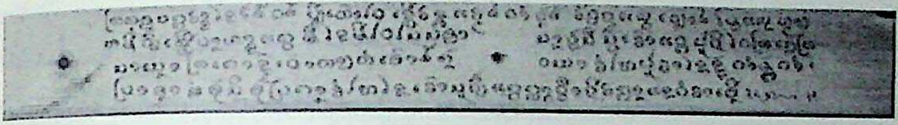

**Figure 2:** BAD-17-1-0402, folio 8 (recto).

> พระพุทธศักราชได้ ๒๕๑๕ ตัว ปีเต่าไจ้ เดือน ๘ แรม ๔ ค่ำ วัน ๕ รจนาแล้ว เวลา ๔ โมงแลง หมายมีเชียงเฟือ บ้านหาดแก้ว ได้มีใจใสศรัทธาสร้างหนังสือ สองข้าวแจกผูกนี้ไว้กับศาสนาพระโคดมเจ้า ตราบต่อเท่า ๕ พันวัสสา ขอให้ผู้ข้าได้ดังคำมักคำปรารถนาทุกสิ่งทุกประการ ขอให้ได้เข้าสู่เวียงแก้วกล่าวคือว่านิพพานแดก็ข้าเทอญ

> In Buddhist Era 2515, a *tao chai* year, on the fourth waning day of the eighth [lunar] month , the fifth day of the week,[22] the writing was finished at 4 pm. Xiang Füa from Ban Hat Kaeo had the religious faith to sponsor the making of this manuscript entitled *Sòng khao chaek* [Benefits derived from distributing rice to the deceased] to support the Teachings of Gotama Buddha to last until the end of five thousand years. May all my wishes be fulfilled. May I enter Nibbāna, definitely.

Sometimes a scribe acted as a co-sponsor together with a close relative. This is clearly the case in the colophon of manuscript BAD-17-1-0284, which mentions a person named Phummapannya (Bhūmāpaññā), probably a monk, as the scribe and his unnamed elder sister (*üai*, เอื้อย) who donated the palm leaves. It is an *Anisong* manuscript entitled *Sòng sangkhan* (Benefits derived from sponsoring a New Year festival).[23] The merit from this donation is dedicated to their deceased parents, brothers, and sisters.

Many of the scribes were monks and novices; the remainder were former monks and novices. The vast majority of sponsors/donors were laypeople. Analysis of the monasteries and home villages of scribes and sponsors/donors reveals that almost half (12) of leading monastic supporters (monks and novices) were based (predictably) at Vat Xiang Thòng, followed by Vat Pak Khan (4). Roughly half of the 91 manuscripts recording home villages of leading lay supporters cite two town quarters in the immediate vicinity of Vat Xiang Thòng: namely Ban Xiang Thòng (22) and Ban Kang. Neither is this surprising. However, an astonishingly high number of manuscripts (9) were commissioned by a sponsor from the village of Ban Koen in the northwestern province of Luang Namtha, more than 200 km north of Luang Prabang. The most likely explanation is that Saen Chan, the aristocratic sponsor of all nine manuscripts,[24] was a local offical in Luang Prabang. It was more convenient for him to express his connection with his distant home village in this way than producing the manuscripts in Luang Namtha and bringing them to Luang Prabang.

Principal manuscript lay sponsors were mainly couples, listed under the name of the husband followed by the wife. The couple would credit their children (*luk* ลูก), grandchildren (*lan* หลาน), great-grandchildren (*len* เหลน), or simply the "whole family" (*phanthuvongsa* พันธุวงศา) as beneficiaries of the merit. A surprisingly large number of colophons (86) cite a woman as principal lay supporter, either individually or with her husband as a secondary credit. Women are recognizable as *sao* or *nang* for younger and middle-aged women and *pa* (aunt) for older women, or simply *mae-òk* (laywoman). It is possible that a sole woman as leading lay supporter was either unmarried or widowed; in the latter case, children and other family members would explicitly be mentioned as beneficiaries. Many sponsors were nobles or aristocrats, indicated by such titles as *phia*, *phanya*, *mün* and *saen*. Six manuscripts were sponsored by members of the royal family, far less than in the manuscript collection recently discovered at Vat Si Bun Hüang, with 18 royally sponsored manuscripts (Khamvone and Grabowsky 2017). Two of the most prominent royal sponsors were Prince Saloemsak Rasasamphanthavong and his wife, Princess Buasi, who commissioned manuscript BAD-17-1-0437 in 1961/1962 to celebrate the prince's birthday. The colophon is immediately visible. Unlike the main text, it is written on the last two-thirds of the recto of folio 33, and not on the full length of the palm leaf, leaving the first third (on the left side) blank:

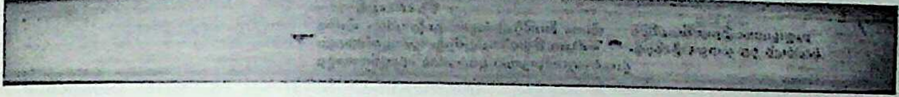

Figure 3: BAD-17-1-0437, folio 33 (recto).

> พิมพาร่ำไรผูกนี้ ข้าพเจ้า เจ้าศรีเฉลิมศักดิ์ เจ้าราชสัมพันธวงศ์ พระสามี และเจ้านางบัวสี มเหสี บ้านกาง มีเจตนาศรัทธาพร้อมกัน สร้างไว้ในพระพุทธศาสนา เมื่อวัน ๖ ออกใหม่ ๑๔ ค่ำ เดือนยี่ พ.ศ. ๒๕๐๔ เพื่อเป็นที่ระลึกในคราวอายุครบนั้น นิพฺพานํ ปรมํ สุขํ โหตุ นิจฺจํ ทุวํ ทุวํ ขอให้ได้ดังคำมักคำปรารถนาทุกประการแด ก็ข้าเทอญ

> This manuscript titled *Phimpha hamhai*, I, Prince Saloemsak Rasasampanthavong, the [royal] husband and Princess Buasi, the queen, from Ban Kang had the religious faith to sponsor the making of the manuscript to support the Teachings of the Buddha on the sixth day of the week, the fourteenth waxing day of the second [lunar] month BE 2504[25] in commemoration of the anniversary of my birthday. *Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ hotu niccaṃ dhuvaṃ* (Nibbāna is the highest state of happiness, continuously and forever.) May our wishes be fulfilled, definitely.

Manuscripts kept in a monastic repository belonged to that monastery, but they were frequently loaned out for study and replication to monks from nearby monasteries or for use in Buddhist rituals and ceremonies outside the monastery's compound. Scribes used to admonish borrowers of manuscripts to return them, such as in the following rather short colophon in the Tham-Lao script (BAD-17-1-0320): "Novice Daeng was the scribe of this manuscript. Anyone who borrows it has to return it." (ຂະນ້ອຍເນອ ຫນັງສືອຈົວແດງເປັນຜູ້ຣິຈນາ ແມ່ນໃຜຢືມໃຫ້ສົ່ງ). Occasionally, ownership statements help to identify the provenance of a manuscript that does not contain any paratextual information about scribe and sponsor(s). Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-17-1-0138, which contains one chapter (fascicle 2) of the *Phra Malai* legend,[26] has no colophon; the ownership statement on the verso of folio 1 reads: ວັດປາກຄານ (Vat Pak Khan). This indicates that this fascicle — part of a larger codilogical unit of several fascicles — originally belonged to Vat Pak Khan, a monastery in the immediate neighborhood of Vat Xiang Thòng.

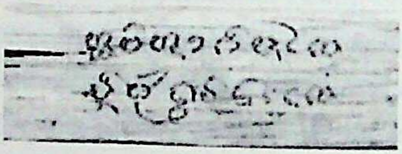

**Figure 4:** Folio 1r, manuscript title (Dhamma script), *Malai Saen*, fascicle 2.

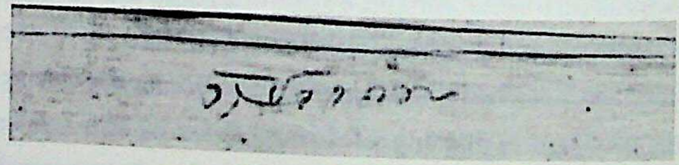

**Figure 5:** Folio 1v, ownership statement (Lao Buhan script), *Vat Saen* (Sukharam).

## Conclusion

Luang Prabang and Nan both have glorious, though turbulent, histories as the centers of Buddhist kingdoms that made valuable contributions to the Buddhist culture of Thailand and Laos. The unique endeavors of Khruba Kañcana, abbot of Wat Sung Men, demonstrate that both Nan and Luang Prabang were thriving centres of manuscript production during the first half of the 19th century. Moreover, Luang Prabang has retained its status as center, not only for the northern region but for the whole of Laos. The production of manuscripts continues in Luang Prabang; Lao manuscript culture is alive! Intellectual monks, such as Phra Khamchan Virachitto, late abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, built up impressive collections of manuscripts and other documents, both written and photographic, which represent part of the cultural heritage of Luang Prabang. Research undertaken by the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang since 2005 has resulted in a number of digitization projects and catalogs that serve as tools for further research on Lao Buddhist manuscripts.

Analysis of colophons from these manuscripts reveals some interesting features. The structure and content of the colophons of the corpus as a whole are barely different from other Lao, northern Thai, and Tai Lü manuscripts, which bear religious texts. However, other aspects are astonishing, such as the relatively high proportion of women as principal lay supporters and the presence of royalty among manuscript sponsors and donors. Several colophons deepen our understanding of the cooperation between scribes, sponsors, and donors in the making of a manuscript.

A lot of projects have been carried out over the past few years to preserve, document, and digitize manuscripts in various parts of Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia. However, there is still much to be done to identify physically or culturally endangered collections of manuscripts in monastic repositeries and under private ownership. I hope that this work helps to raise awareness of and expidite research in the diverse manuscript cultures of the Tai/Thai and Lao and to preserve and publicize this precious heritage of the people in the region.

## Endnote: From Nan to Luang Prabang

1. An earlier version of this chapter was published in the *Journal of International Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (December 2019), pp. 173-208.

2. These three vassal states sent considerably taller "gold and silver trees" (*tonmai ngoen tonmai thòng*) as tribute gifts to Bangkok than Lampang, Lamphun, Phrae, and the Malay sultanates in the South. Grabowsky and Turton 2003: 176.

3. The life and work of Khruba Kañana is appreciated in detail in McDaniel 2009, pp. 125-31. The abbot's productive carrier is also well summarized by Hundius (1990), pp. 34-35.

4. *Inscription Müang Nan 1837*. Phanphen Khrüathai and Silao Ketphrom 2001, pp. 43-49.

5. 1198 Phalguna 15 = Tuesday, March 21, 1837. This day was a *ka kai* day and thus should be the correct corresponding date of the Gregorian calendar.

6. *Inscription Wat Wichun* (*Vat Vixun*) *1837*. Phanphen Khrüathai and Silao Ketphrom 2001, pp. 279-285.)

7. For a fine introduction to Lao Buddhism with emphasis on Luang Prabang, see Holt 2009 and Heywood 2006.

8. Pha One Keo Sitthivong was born on May 3, 1964, in Ban Naxay village, Naxaithong district, Vientiane. Between 1995 and 2001, he practiced Vipassana meditation at Vat Sok Pa Luang under Pha Maha Sali Kantasilo (1933-2013) and studied at Sangha College in Vat Ong Tue, Vientiane. In 2002, Pha Khamchan appointed him chairman of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization (LBFO) of Luang Prabang district. In 2013, he became chairman of the LBFO in Luang Prabang province. He is the director of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang and a highly socially engaged monk. He extensively developed Buddhist education in the province by creating the Buddhist Academic Institute at Vat Pa Pha O, roughly 13 km to the north of Luang Prabang. This is the highest Buddhist educational institute in northern Laos, housing more than 200 young novices.

9. His last honorific title was Somdet Phra Buddhachan (at Asabha Mahathera).

10. For Pha Khamchan's correspondence and its value as an historical source regarding relations between Sangha and laity in contemporary Laos, see Khamvone 2015.

11. See Grabowsky and Berger 2015, Appendix 3.

12. The Venerable Abbot's collection of manuscripts, books, journals, personal correspondence, and historical photographs spanning almost six decades has been analyzed in various articles in Grabowsky and Berger 2015.

13. For details, see the catalog of the Vat Si Bun Hüang manuscript corpus, Khamvone and Grabowsky 2017; and Grabowsky 2019.

14. *Vessantara Jātaka* is the last story of the *Jātaka*, which is a series of 547 canonical tales recounting the past lives of the Buddha. Bounleuth 2016, 110.

15. Arthid Sheravanichkul's seminal study of gift-giving in the Thai and Lao world (2009/2010) demonstrates that the gifts recommended in *Anisong* texts pertain to: a) giving alms to the Sangha (food and medicine, robes and cloth, such ritual offerings as flowers and lamps, sponsorship for temple building construction, copying of religious texts); b) producing objects of worship (images, stupas); c) constructing public works (bridges, roads, hospitals, schools), and d) giving gifts in ceremonies or festivals (celebrations for a new house, funerals, the Buddhist New Year). Manuscripts from the Pha Khamchan Virachitto collection containing *Anisong* are analyzed in Bounleuth 2015 and Bounleuth 2016, 130-36.

16. *Anisong* is derived from Pali *ānisaṃsa* which means 'benefit, advantage, good result'. In Laos the term Salòng, often contracted to Sòng is preferred. This word derives from Khmer: *chlaṅ*, "to dedicate", "to celebrate". The primary meaning of the Khmer word, however, is "to cross, to intersect", as is also the case in the infixed form *camlòng* (จำลอง) in Thai and then also means "to celebrate across" (f.e. the new year).

17. For the origins and spread of the Dhamma script, see Grabowsky 2008.

18. Pāli: *likhita* "written or inscribed," past partiple of *likhati*, from *likh* = "to write or to inscribe."

19. BAD-17-1-0375 and BAD-17-1-0414.

20. Though the Pāli terms *mūlasaddhā* and *saddhā* both refer to religious faith, in the Lao and Thai context they can both denote faith and designate the religious believer.

21. 1304 Vaisakha 14 = Tuesday, 28 April 1942.

22. 1334 Pratomashada 19 = Thursday June 29, 1972; 1334 Toutyashada 19 = Saturday July, 29, 1972.

23. Sommai Premchit and Amphay Doré (1992, 176) explain: "The word *Sangkhan* or *Songkran* in standard Thai is derived from *Sankranti*, or *sankhara* in Pāli, meaning the shift of the sun from one sign of the zodiac to another, and particularly in this case from Pisces to Aries." The *Sòng sangkhan* text describes the arrival of the Sun deity (*suriyathevabut*) and its crossing to Aries (*lasi mek*) at the beginning of the New Year. During this transition to Aries, suffering, diseases, and disasters are prevalent. People are rendered safe by welcoming the "arrival of Aries" through meritorious gift-giving. The text also adds that the traditions of pouring water in veneration of the Triple Gems and the sprinkling of fragrant water on elderly relatives is part of New Year merit-making. The rewards of the merit focus on longevity, prosperity, and a a good rebirth.

24. BAD-17-1-0008, BAD-17-1-0014, BAD-17-1-0015, BAD-17-1-0028, BAD-17-1-0029, BAD-17-1-0031, BAD-17-1-0332, BAD-17-1-0369, and BAD-17-1-0540.

25. 1323 Pausha 14 = Friday January 19, 1961.

26. The story of Pha (Phra) Malai is a Buddhist legend. The immediate model is a Pāli text originally from northern Thailand. The work describes the adventures of a monk, Phra Malai, who is endowed with supernatural forces. After visits to the sinners in hell, the gods in heaven, and the future Buddha Maitreya (Metteyya), he returns to Earth and proclaims the Buddhist teachings. Although the legend of Phra Malai is known in Burma (Myanmar) and Cambodia, manuscripts with illustrations were produced only in central Thailand, especially during the 19th century. Because of its cathartic effect, this popular legend was read at weddings and cremation ceremonies by monks and laymen alike. Brereton 1995; Denis 1965; Collins 1993.

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*Vat Xiang Thòng collection*

BAD-17-1-0008: *Nyòt tham* (Supreme Dhamma); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 7 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CE 1286, a *kap cai* year (AD 1924).

BAD-17-1-0014: *Sakkaban* (part of the Vessantara Jataka); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 14 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CE 1286, a *kap cai* year (AD 1924).

BAD-17-1-0015: *Chulaphon* (part of the Vessantara Jataka); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 18 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CE 1286, a *kap cai* year (AD 1924).

BAD-17-1-0028: *Lam Mahavet* (Vessantara Jataka); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 31 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CE 1286, a *kap cai* year (AD 1924).

BAD-17-1-0029: *Sapphasut* (All kinds of Sutta); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 31 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CE 1274, a *tao chai* year (AD 1912).

BAD-17-1-0031: *Thatsaphòn* (part of the Vessantara Jataka); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 18 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1286, a *hap khai* year (AD 1924).

BAD-17-1-0138: *Malai saen* (Phra Malai), fascicle 2; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 12 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao, Lao; undated.

BAD-17-1-0173: *Upasamphathakammavacha*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 30 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1282 or CS 1286 (AD 1920 or 1924).

BAD-17-1-0221: *Maha Munlanipphan* (Mahā Mūlanibbāna); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 41 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; AD 1942, a *tao sanga* year.

BAD-17-1-0284: *Sòng thung lek* (Benefits gained from making an iron flag); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 4 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; unknown.

BAD-17-1-0320: *Untitled* (*Lam Phavetsantara; Sakkati*); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 19 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1271, a *kat hao* year (AD 1909).

BAD-17-1-0327: *Untitled* (*Lam paet mün*); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 20 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; [CS] 1179, a *moeng pao* year (AD 1817).

BAD-17-1-0332: *Himmaphan* (part of the Vessantara Jataka); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 19 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1286, a *kap chai* year (AD 1924).

BAD-17-1-0366: *Untitled* (Kammavāca); palm-leaf manuscript; 1 fascicles with a total number of 55 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1174, a *kap sanga* year (AD 1812).

BAD-17-1-0369: *Salòng maha vetsantara* (Benefits gained from the sponsoring of Vessantara Jataka manuscripts); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 8 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1286, a *kap chai* year (AD 1924).

BAD-17-1-0375: *Sisuthon*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 8 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1276, a *poek si* year (AD 1914).

BAD-17-1-0414: *Niyai ngua nòi* (Story of the little calf); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 7 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1138, a *moeng khai* year (AD 1776).

BAD-17-1-0436: *Sisuthon*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 33 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2516, a *ka pao* year (AD 1973).

BAD-17-1-0437: *Phimpha hamhai* (Paññā pāramī); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 34 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2516 (AD 1974).

BAD-17-1-0440: *Niyai sangkanibat*, first fascicle; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 26 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2515, a *huang khai* year (AD 1972).

BAD-17-1-0540: *Himmaphan* (part of the Vessantara Jataka); one fascicle of 19 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1286, a *kap chai* year (AD 1924).

### *Vat Si Bun Hüang collection*

BAD-21-1-0477: *Pathama vongsamarini*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 26 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1]144, a *tao nyi* year (AD 1782).

BAD-21-1-0478: *Untitled* (*Vohan Thesana suttasom*), palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 26 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; [CS 1205], a *ka mao* year (AD 1843).

BAD-21-1-0485: *Untitled* (*Maha vessantara*; The Great Vessantara Jātaka); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 16 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS [1]161, a *kat mot* year (AD 1799).

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# Writing Tai History and Reviving Rituals in Thanh Hóa, the North-Central Region of Vietnam

## ACHARIYA CHOOWONGLERT

In 2004, the Vietnamese central government instigated a policy to restore, revive, and promote various local manuscripts and traditional rituals. This represents a turnaround after decades of repression and restriction under Vietnam's state policy of "selective cultural preservation" of minority nationalities. Through this initiative, the government aims to promote cultural diversity and create equal opportunities, while preserving ethnic cultures. Against a history of nation-building in the face of modernization, promotion of diversity is the state's attempt to integrate local culture into the *Kinh* (ethnic majority). However, by encouraging cultural revitalization, the central government runs the risk of diminished control over local practices and interpretations.

In response to these changes, local Tai people in the north-central region of Vietnam began restoring Tai manuscripts, running Tai language classes, writing historical articles, and organizing worship of *mường* ancestral spirits. Local authorities and Tai scholars are reviving manuscripts to write about Tai history and thereby turn the process of *Kinh* "(Viet)-ization" to "Tai-ization." The aim is to establish an ethnic identity and cultural rights for ethnic minorities. It can be considered a process of empowerment by marginalized people to create a center of cultural and historical prosperity.

# Introduction

In July 2014, I spent one week studying the Tai Thanh Hóa script and reading Tai manuscripts under Hà Nam Ninh and Hà Công Mẩu. Both in their 70s, Hà Nam Ninh is a famous Tai teacher of *lớp học chữ Thái Thanh Hóa* (Tai Thanh Hóa language) and Hà Công Mẩu teaches Tai traditions. I was invited to study the history of Hà Nam Ninh's hometown, Mường Khoòng.[1]

In July 2015, I read *Xứ Khăm Panh* (Lord Khăm Panh) and *Pứn Tư Mã Hai Đào* (The story of Tư Mã Hai Đào) as part of my Tai manuscript studies with Hà Nam Ninh. Lord Khăm Panh was lord of Mường Khoòng, and Tư Mã Hai Đào was lord of Chu Sàn and guardian spirit of the Vietnam-Laos borderlands. These transcriptions of Tai manuscripts inspired me, especially *Pứn Tư Mã Hai Đào*, which was set in either the 14th or the 15th century at a time of war along the Đại Việt-Ai Lao border (the current Vietnam-Laos border). The story deepened my understanding of the Đại Việt's boundary concept and the territorial viewpoints of the Tai people. I decided to explore the implications of *Pứn Tư Mã Hai Đào* for Tai people living in Thanh Hóa, especially in Tai border cities like Quan Sơn, where Tư Mã Hai Đào lived and governed after winning the Đại Việt-Ai Lao war.

Early in 2016, I found out that local people and authorities, as well as lecturers at Hồng Đức University in Thanh Hóa, were searching for additional Tai manuscripts to research Tai history and culture. There are many versions of the stories of such heroes and deities as Lord Khăm Panh of Mường Khoòng and Lord Tư Mã Hai Đào of Mường Xia[2] and Mường Lát.[3] Moreover, local people and authorities have been revitalizing tutelary/city sprit worship called *Lễ hội Mường Xia* (Tai: *Xên Mường Xia*). This is concurrent with teaching Tai language to local authorities, who may be *Kinh* (Viet), *Mường*, Tai or other ethnicities.

Activities such as *Lễ hội Mường Xia* worship in Quan Sơn and Mường Lát distircts are only possible because of the change in national policy on religious and cultural revitalization implemented in the early 2000s.

For decades before state promotion of ethnic written languages, culture, and religion/beliefs, national policy on *bảo tồn, chọn lọc các giá trị văn hóa của dân tộc* (selective cultural preservation of ethnicity/nationality) during the socialist period was the state's mechanism for controlling cultural practices (politics) among ethnic minorities to enforce ethnic assimilation into the framework of nationalism and nation-building. The policy of cultural resurgence in a local context has led to a revival of Tai manuscripts, historiography, culture, and, for example, ancestor/tutelary spirit worship (*lễ hội Mường Xia*). However, Taylor (2007) argues that once this policy is implemented at a grass-roots level, control over local practices and interpretations will be eroded by the reinvention of traditions.

This chapter analyzes the vital role of local people and authorities in the resurgence of Tai manuscripts and historiography alongside teaching Tai language to the local authorities. The concepts of cultural politics of difference, cultural space, and identity politics help to interpret these processes, which are linked to religious practices to construct ethnic identity. That is, analysis shows how local people turn the national process of "*Kinh*-ization" to a localized process of "Tai-ization," transforming marginalized space to a center for historical and cultural prosperity.

Cultural politics of difference focuses on the new language of cultural politics and politics of articulation, where meanings are fluid and perpetually changing. When the politics of difference is applied to ethnicity, it defines new space for identities and constitutes new hybrid identities. Thus, ethnic identity is constructed discursively through cultural practices (Barker 2000, 355–59). Cultural politics of difference emerges from resistance to hegemonic power. Even though ethnic minority groups are marginalized, they can create a cultural space that marks differences. This new space contests exclusion, against the binary ordering of difference by compliance with multiplicity of contestation and interconnection. By choosing marginality, this can become a space of re-centered identity: a counter-hegemonic, more-embracing community of resistance (Soja and Hooper, 2002). In this case, cultural difference moves beyond spatialized cultures to consider the "production of difference" of common and shared things in a connected space (Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

Appadurai develops Lefebvre's "Production of Space" to "Production of Locality." The notion of production of locality leads us to consider people's lives and feelings as creating meaning and value (from William's notion of "structure of feeling"). Appadurai suggests that when working on ethnography by studying the local, we have to change visualizations of history of neighborhood to history of production of locality. This opens up the complex co-production of indigenous categories by creating such groups as organic intellectuals, administrators, and linguists (Appadurai 1995).

Analysis is based on the Tai manuscript of the Story of Tư Mã Hai Đào and other local documents. It also incorporates ethnographic inquiries carried out in Bá Thước, Quan Sơn, and Mường Lát districts in the uplands of Thanh Hóa province, north-central region of Vietnam, near the Vietnam-Laos border. Fieldwork comprised two-week sessions in July 2015; in April, October, and December 2016; and in March 2017.

## Cultural and religious revitalization before and after economic reform in Vietnam

Not long before the economic reforms (*Đổi Mới*) in late 1986, Vietnam's government began to ease repression and restrictions through a policy of "selective cultural preservation of the (minority) nationalities." Present day Vietnam faces the impact of globalization on cultural diversity. The government has been pressurized by international development project donors to promote civil society, equal rights, and unity through multiculturalism and multilingualism. In 1980, the communist party launched Decree 53/CP outlining its policy on ethnic written languages.

Under this policy, ethnic written languages and ancient manuscripts were deemed important because they preserve and develop the nation. Ethnicities without proprietary scripts were encouraged to use the standard Vietnamese-Latin alphabet. Moreover, the government supported teaching and studying of ethnic languages in primary schools.

In 1991, the communist party passed the Law on Child Protection, Care and Education, stipulating that primary school teaching and studying should be conducted in Vietnamese. Nonetheless, ethnic groups have the right to learn their ethnic language concurrently with Vietnamese. Accordingly, in 1987 the party launched a policy to guarantee ethnic minority groups the right to preserve and use their own languages. On November 27, 1989, the Communist Party of Vietnam annouced a policy under which Resolution 22 promotes a resurgence of ethnic languages. This assures ethnic minority groups of their rights to preserve and promote their own customs, tradition, and culture (Hóa 1998, 88).

A revival of ethnic languages, writing culture, and history began in Thanh Hóa in 1992, when the deputy director of the department of education and training began production of ethnic language textbooks for primary schools. More than 3,000 Tai pupils in Thanh Hóa province fell under the umbrella of this project (Hóa 1998, 88–9). In addition to schools, the Tai language revival was officially organized and training was provided to key Tai officers in Quan Hóa district. They systematically formulated curriculums and prepared textbooks using abridged Tai manuscripts for a pilot project. For the state, the objectives of teaching ethnic languages were to encourage ethnic people to use their own language and to preserve ethnic material cultures (in this case, Tai manuscripts). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education issued directive 03/2006/QĐ-BGD&ĐT on November 24, 2006, and the prime minister promulgated instruction 38/2004/CT-TT on November 9, 2004, to encourage teaching and studying of ethnic minority languages among local authorities in areas with a high ethnic demographic density.

Accordingly, since 2013 the people's committee of Thanh Hóa province has been conducting a Tai language teaching project for local authorities in upland districts with large Tai populations.

In 2004, the government launched a national ordinance promising freedom of traditional ritual practices. In particular, the practice of ancestor worship was actively revived and promoted under the slogan *về nguồn* (return to origin) (Jellema 2007, 61). Although this seems to represent a juxtaposition of nationalism with cultural diversity and ethnic equality, ancestor worship is intended to focus on traditional Vietnamese values. This marriage of cultural identity and nationalism can also be viewed as a cultural strategy to expedite integration in the globalizing world of Vietnam (Chinh 2007, 2016).

Religious movements are often seen as a response to inequality, insecurity, and anxiety in the modern world. Taylor (2007) argues that most Vietnamese scholars view religion as a form of local folklore and part of an expression of national identity that is imbued with national values. The related issues of association with changing social relations and global engagement are residual. Moreover, he deliberates that religion and politics are interrelated. It is not just a matter of which traditions in the past still hold value. In contemporary Vietnam, the state utilizes religious and multicultural promotion to legitimize their power and unify the nation, so religious movements can be viewed as resistance to state power, especially among marginalized groups. Jellema (2007, 61) suggests that cultural revitalization (such as ancestor worship) in association with political changes that promote the *về nguồn* movement translates to civic dialog between society and the state. This means that cultural revitalization is not primarily an issue of nationalism in contemporary Vietnam. Therefore, understanding cultural revitalization is linked to marketization and promotion of national identity with cultural differences integrated through production of locality.

As power today is, in general, global power, people's lives depend much more on the global market. Socialist systems lead to inefficiency and gradual loss of state control over the economy. However, the state still needs to maintain nationalism and trust in the Communist Party and in the state. Ancestor worship (in Confucian terms) tends to teach people to take responsibility for the nation (Chinh 2016). To retain legitimacy over the Vietnamese people, the state has to shift its power from the economic sphere to the cultural sphere. By this logic, the state sees religious/cultural revitalization as a means to legitimize itself in construction of national identity to recall its former unity, but people practice cultural and religious activities in response to state restrictions and suppression of other social movements (Taylor 2007). At a local level, ritual practice can be considered a mechanism to maintain ethnic boundaries and ethnic differentiation as an expression of ethnic identity. Conversely, religious practices can be seen as the way that minorities visualize the nation, rather than the role and impact of the government on minority groups (Selemink 2008, 267–69). Furthermore, local power lies with both bureaucratic organizations and local authorities, as well as with sacred and traditional authorities. Ritual/cultural practices help us to understand political society, encompassing the complex relationships that link local people to the various kinds of power (Anan 2012; Walker 2012).

## Who are the Tai in Thanh Hóa?

According to Tai scholar Professor Cầm Trọng in *The Thai Ethnic Community in Vietnam* (2007), the Tai population in Vietnam can be divided culturally into three geographical areas: Northwest Vietnam or "Thái-Mèo autonomous region"; Thanh Hóa and Nghệ An provinces; and, in between these two areas. However, Đặng Nghiêm Vạn, Vietnamese professor of Ethnology and Tai Studies, divides the Tai into three different groups: Black Tai, mostly living in the Northwest Region, especially in Sơn La, Nghĩa Lộ, Yên Bái, Tuần Giáo, and Điện Biên provinces and in Thanh Hóa and Nghệ An provinces in the north-central region; White

Tai living in the Northwest Region, especially in Lai Châu province, Quỳnh Nhai, and Phù Yên districts; and Red Tai in Mộc Châu district, Hòa Bình province, and the uplands of Thanh Hóa and Nghệ An provinces.

Thus, the Tai in Thanh Hóa are different from the Tai in the Northwest Region, referred to above as Black Tai (Tai Đăm) and White Tai (*Tai Đòn*). Moreover, local Tai in Thanh Hóa dislike the assignation by French and other overseas scholars as Tai Daeng or Red Tai. This can only apply to a minority of people living in Mường Đeng (Red City) (Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Tỉnh Thanh Hóa, 2014: 9). The Tai in Thanh Hoá originate from many places. Specifically, they derive from cities in the Red River Delta, the Northwest Region, the northern region, and Laos. The groups that describe themselves as "Black Tai" (Tay Mươi) and as "White Tai" (Tay Dọ) are from the Northwest Region. Normally the Tai in Thanh Hóa identify with the place they live. For example, Thái Mường Khoong means they are the Tai from Mường (city) Khoong. Hereinafter, the Tai in Thanh Hoá are referred to as "Tai Thanh Hóa."

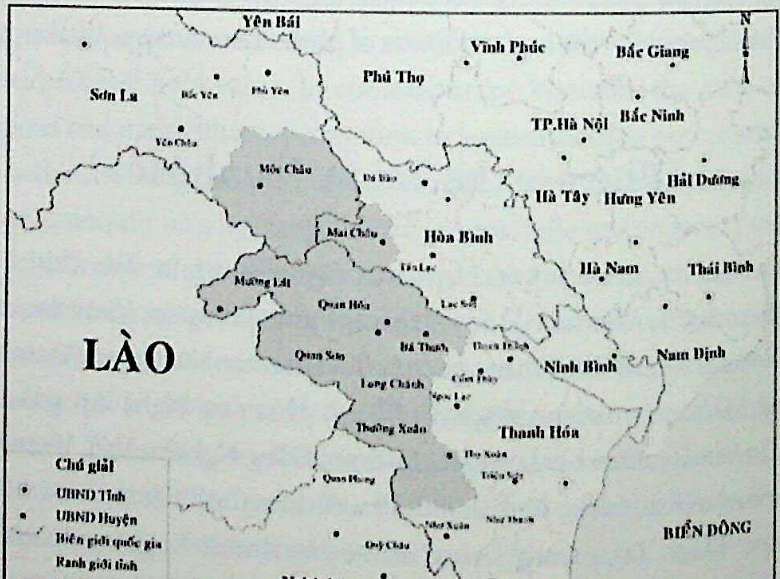

Yên Bái
Sơn La
Bắc Yên
Phù Yên
Yên Châu
Mộc Châu
Phú Thọ
Vĩnh Phúc
Bắc Giang
Bắc Ninh
TP.Hà Nội
Hải Dương
Hà Tây
Hưng Yên
Đà Bắc
Mai Châu
Hòa Bình
Tân Lạc
Lạc Sơn
Hà Nam
Thái Bình
Mường Lát
Quan Hóa
LÀO
Quan Sơn
Bá Thước
Thạch Thành
Ninh Bình
Nam Định
Cẩm Thủy
Lang Chánh
Ngọc Lặc
Thường Xuân
Thanh Hóa
Thọ Xuân
Triệu Sơn
Quan Phong
Như Xuân
Như Thanh
Quỳ Châu
BIỂN ĐÔNG
Nghệ An
N
Chú giải
UBND Tỉnh
UBND Huyện
Biên giới quốc gia
Ranh giới tỉnh
Ranh giới huyện

**Figure 1:** The Tai settlement in Thanh Hóa. (*Source*: Trần Thị Ngọc Trinh)

Historically, the small principalities of Tai Thanh Hóa were located in the west and uplands of Mường Thanh (present Thanh Hóa), which belonged to the Vietnamese Kingdom. Thus, Mường Thanh's small Tai principalities were excluded from the Sip Sòng Châu Tai federation;[4] the history of this region's relationship with the Vietnamese court/state is quite different from that of Sip Sòng Châu Tai, especially the history of the Black Tai of Mường Thanh, currently Điện Biên Phủ province. Tai principalities in Mường Thanh (Hóa) had no accord with other principalities of Sip Sòng Châu Tai, except with adjoining principality Mường Mun (presently Mai Châu district, Hòa Bình province) and with cities in present-day Hoa Phan and Pong Sali provinces in Laos. The dominant authorities shared a close relationship with the Vietnamese court, unlike with other Tai principalities and the Lao court. Although it was an historically dominant-subordinate relationship with the Vietnamese court, it was not strictly enforced; it was more of a relationship of interdependence. For example, in the early 16th century the Lord of Mường Lai (Tai polity) Cần Ngàn, the Lord of Sơn La, and the Lord of Thuận Châu rebelled against the Vietnamese court at Hanoi. Tai principalities in Thanh Hóa dispatched troops to help Đại Việt suppress the rebellions. Between 1754 and 1767, Mường Thanh twice helped the Vietnamese court to supress uprisings. On both occasions the rebellions were spearheaded by Hoàng Công Chất. Unlike other Tai principalities in the Sip Sòng Châu Tai federation, the Chief of Tai principalities in Thanh Hóa sided with the Vietnamese court.

One prominant event indicated that the Tai in Thanh Hóa supported Đại Việt and the Việt Nam empire: the Thanh Hóa people's rebellion against French Colonization, led by Tai commander Cầm Bá Thước, as part of the *Cần Vương* movement[5] in 1885 (Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Tỉnh Thanh Hóa, 2014, 16–17). Cầm Bá Thước and Hà Văn Mao were well-known Tai fighting leaders. In 1887, Ha Văn Mao's troops were destroyed and Cầm Bá Thước was arrested. This effectively calmed unrest by the Cần Vương movement in Thanh Hóa (Ban Chấp hành Đảng bộ huyện

Quan Sơn 2006, 11). This landmark event established Cầm Bá Thước as a local (Tai) hero. In 1945, the western upland of Thanh Hóa was named Bá Thước District when the state conferred district status on the mountainous city of Tân Hóa.

After the founding of the Communist Party of Vietnam in July 1930, the Tai Thanh Hóa took on the role of leading the fight for state independence. Thanh Hóa was a zone of conflict with the French. The Vietnam-Laos border and land along the *Mã* River had been captured by French troops. Quan Sơn became a fierce battlefield before being liberated by Việt Minh[6] on November 11, 1949. The Tai in Quan Hóa took part in resistance against the French from 1947 to 1954. The written and oral histories among local scholars portray local/ethnic people as heroes against the empire/state.

## Resurgence of Tai scripts and local standardization of Tai language

After decades of repression and restrictions on ethnic cultures, local Thanh Hóa leaders and authorities of have been being actively reviving Tai manuscripts and written language by recording their culture and history and by teaching and studying the Tai language. Many local Tai scholars are devoted to reviving Tai manuscripts and to negotiating standardization to preserve local language in the face of such changes as standardization of Tai orthography by the central government. Hà Nam Ninh is a 73-year-old man living in Bá Thước district, Thanh Hóa province. Since 1985, he has devoted himself to reviving manuscripts and the written langage of Tai Thanh Hóa and to recording Tai history. Throughout his life, Tai people in Thanh Hóa, including Hà Nam Ninh himself, have spoken Vietnamese in daily life. Realizing that his language could soon disappear, at the age of 36 years Hà Nam Ninh started learning Tai from his father, and then from the village chief and elders.

The ability to speak his own ethnic language — to communicate in Tai — made him feel alive![7] After many years working in the education section as a secondary school teacher,[8] Hà Nam Ninh is deeply concerned about the decline of the Tai language:

> The children grow up, go to school, and only remember their Tai origins when they complete their family profile declarations. The Tai families talk to each other in Kinh language. There is hardly a child who knows their own language. Apparently, the Tai language is gradually being forgotten. Many Tai children, born and raised in Mường Khoòng (present Bá Thước district) are unable to speak Tai.[9]

My fieldwork in Thanh Hóa on three occasions from 2013 to 2017 found that Tai families speak Tai mixed with modified Vietnamese in everyday life. Many children can speak Tai. Some Tai families speak Tai at home, but speak Vietnamese, even with other Tai, when discussing complicated matters. My overall impression was positive: People in Tai Thanh Hóa still speak Tai in everyday life.

Hà Nam Ninh's concerns over lost Tai language, culture, and history drove him to start learning to speak, read, and write Tai 30 years ago. He has collected ancient Tai manuscripts, rewritten them to formulate curriculums, and is teaching Tai language. Often without financial support, Hà Nam Ninh has travelled throughout Tai communities in Thanh Hóa to collect ancient manuscripts and conduct research. After retirement, he has continued as a volunteer teacher for local officials in villages across Thanh Hóa. In addition, he is author and co-author of articles on Tai culture and history and textbooks for teaching and studying Tai Thanh Hóa language. Through 30 years of serious study, Hà Nam Ninh has compiled a wealth of information from ancient Tai manuscripts. He is now well-known as an ancient Tai script revivalist, colloquially known as *Ông Ninh chữ Thái* (Mr. Ninh, the Tai alphabet man).

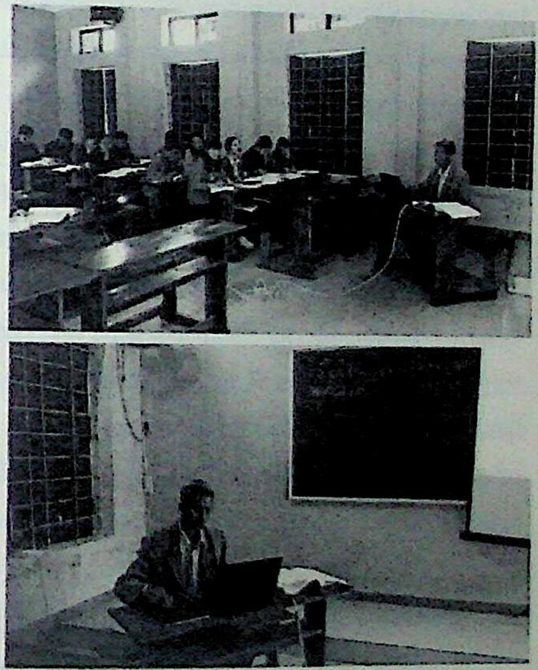
National policy implemented in the 1950s and 1960s has meant that Tai standardized orthography in the early 2000s is based on Black Tai language from *Sơn La* province, Northwest Region. This has been introduced widely across all Tai communities in Vietnam, inclulding such north central regions as Thanh Hóa, Hòa Bình, and Nghệ An. Ngô Xuân Sao is a lecturer at and director of the social science and development research institute at Hồng Đức University. He and other academics perceive standardization of Tai as contrary to their culture. Retracing hundreds of years of history, they feel no common conscious or shared ethnicity with the Tai in the northwest. Furthermore, studying standardized Tai does not achieve their objectives in terms of reading their own documents nor engender pride in preserving their own cultural heritage.

Teaching and studying standardized Tai in Thanh Hóa necessarily has mixed objectives. First, it complies with national policy of *đoàn kết dân tộc* (hamonization of ethnic groups). For some local authorities, promoting the study of standardized Tai is useful for connectivity with the central government. Second, it unites Tai in Thanh Hóa with Black Tai and other Tai groups in Vietnam. Hà Nam Ninh argues: *dạy và học chữ Thái thống nhất là để ngoại giao và đoàn kết giữa Thái Thanh Hóa và các người Thái khác ở Việt Nam* (Teaching and studying the united Tai language is the way of diplomacy to unite Tai Thanh Hóa with all Tai groups in Vietnam).[10] There are now some standardized Tai language classes taught in parallel with Tai Thanh Hóa language classes in Thanh Hóa.

Although Hà Nam Ninh teaches both Tai orthography styles, he prefers Tai Thanh Hóa. He explained: *bởi vì chữ đó là hồn mình* (because it is our spirit). That is why he has devoted himself doing research and writing textbooks and books about Tai Thanh Hóa language, history and culture.

In 2014, a textbook was produced entitled *Tại Liệu Đào Tạo, Bồi Dưỡng Tiếng Thái* (*Dùng cho cán bộ, công chức công tác ở vùng dân tộc, miền núi Thanh Hóa*) (Training Document, Fostering Tai Language (used for staff and officers working in the uplands of Thanh Hóa)). It was published by the People's Committee of Thanh Hóa province for local authorities in the uplands of Thanh Hóa, regardless of ethnicity. Each upland district has a class, with Kinh and Mường local authorities outnumbering Tai. Although the book is for Tai language training, the first part tells the history of the Tai race (in mainland Southeast Asia, in Vietnam, and in Thanh Hóa). It emphasizes the culture and history of the Tai in Thanh Hóa in relation to the Kinh and the Mường, as well as the Tai people's contribution to premodern state- and nation-building.

TÀI LIỆU ĐÀO TẠO, BỒI DƯỠNG TIẾNG THÁI



(*left*) **Figure 2**: Textbook on Tai Language Studies, produced by the People's Committee of Thanh Hóa Province. (*right*) **Figure 3**: Tai Language Training Class in Như Thanh District, led by Hà Nam Ninh. (Photograph: Achariya Choowonglert, December 23, 2016)

My own fieldwork uncovered serious preservation of local manuscripts and language by local academics and provincial officials. In June 2011, the Provincial People's Committee assigned research work to implement the Resolution of the 9th Congress of the Party's Central Executive Comittee and the Resolution of the 17th Congress Party of Thanh Hóa province in the field of culture. The theme was research, collection, and compilation of documents to develop a new alphabet from the old Tai Thanh Hóa alphabet. The project is managed by the Center for Information Technology and Communication, Department of Information and Communications, headed by Hà Văn Thường,[11] deputy chief of the Provincial Party's Management Office. After a period of study, the researchers and engineers published their work in the form of software using a new typeface for the ancient Thaí Thanh Hóa script comprising 43 letters and 23 punctuation marks. Their work was assessed favorably and approved by the Provincial People's Committee. This is an important step in helping the Thai community to preserve Tai language in the modern age.

Provincial officials and other groups involved in this project also produced a documentary entitled "The Spirit Keeper for Tai Ancient Writings," which was broadcast on national television channel VCTV6. When I was studying Thái Thanh Hóa language with Hà Nam Ninh in 2014, he introduced me to Thái Thanh Hóa script software called *Chữ Thái Thanh Cổ* (ancient Tai *Thanh* alphabet). In the context of preservation of Thái Thanh Hó*a* orthography, Hà Văn Thường remarked:

> In recent years, our group has gathered together to research, collect, compile, develop fonts for, and digitize *Thái Thanh Hóa* ancient letters. So far, we have taught pilot classes in three districts: Quan Sơn, Quan Hóa, and Bá Thước. Generally, this writing system was enthusiastically received by leaders and residents in the selected districts — especially by the elderly. We are aware that traditional Thái Thanh Hóa written language is the common property of the whole nation, not only the Thai people. Therefore, we now need to preserve and gradually to promote this Tai traditional orthography. Hopefully people devoted to Tai culture, and especially to the

> perfection of Thái Thanh Hóa traditional orthography, will take this opportunity to learn to use Tai orthography on the computer, thereby contributing to and preserving the spirit of Tai orthography through the cultural treasure of Thanh Hóa.[12]

This corresponds with the televised comments made by Hà Nam Ninh:

> To preserve Tai (Thanh Hóa) language is to record knowledge and arts (such as poetry) as well as many other things. While this is of scientific value, it is also a national spiritual asset: if one does not know and does not understand, one cannot be Tai.[13]

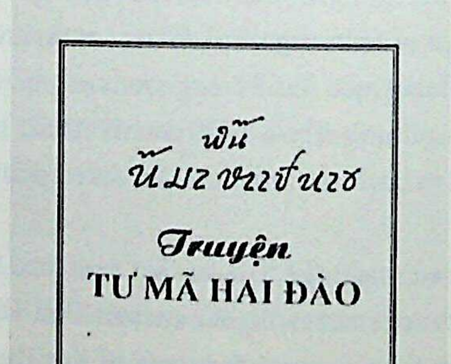
To say that "To preserve Tai (Thanh Hóa) language is to record knowledge and arts (such as poetry) as well as many other things . . . also a national spiritual asset" shows the compliance of Hà Nam Ninh with the national discourse. However, the concurrent local discourse *ai biết phong tục tập quán, biết lời hát, biết chữ nữa, thì người ta càng quý* (the more you know the lyrics of folksongs and ancient orthography, the more you are respected) differs from Tai homogenous ethnicity (noncompliance with Tai standardization). Thus, to preserve ethnic culture and history can be considered as both assimilation and differentiation in the national framework.

Regardless of rationale, the fact is that teaching has continued; the number of people conversant with the ancient Thái Thanh Hóa script has risen continuously for 20 years. A survey of the Thanh Hóa education sector revealed that in 2006 there were only 20 people in the province who could read Tai. By 2014, the figure had grown to more than 1,000.[14] This track record indicates the success of preserving Tai Thanh Hóa culture in the national framework of contemporary Vietnam and also the construction of a community united through Tai orthography (*chữ Thái thống nhất*). This process also bridges the gap between the local authorities and Tai people.

## Writing Tai history and reviving rituals

Concurrently with teaching and studying Tai language, the local population and local authorities in western districts of Thanh Hóa have been recording Tai history. For example, Hà Nam Ninh and Hà Công Mẩu have been collecting Tai manuscripts. They have used these resources to write Tai history through the story of *Tạo Khăm Panh* (Lord Khăm Panh), who governed Mường Khoòng (now in Bá Thước district) during the 15th century.

Historiography is utilized for religious revitalization among the Tai in Thanh Hóa. For example, a historiography of Tư Mã Hai Đào was produced by locals and authorities in Bá Thước and Quan Sơn districts. One such document is entitled *Pứn Tư Mã Hai Đào* (Vietnamese: *Chuyện Tư Mã Hai Đào;* the Story of Tư Mã Hai Đào), which was produced by Hà Nam Ninh and Hà Công Mẩu by recording and transcribing into Tai the chanting of a shaman in Mường Khoòng.



Truyện
TƯ MÃ HAI ĐÀO

**Figure 4:** Document entitled Pứn Tư Mã Hai Đào (Vietnamese: Chuyện Tư Mã Hai Đào; the Story of Tư Mã Hai Đào), written in Tai by Hà Công Mậu and Hà Nam Ninh.

Oral history[15] relates that Tư Mã Hai Đào was Đại Việt's commander-in-chief. He defeated the army of the Kingdom of Lang Sang (Ai Lao). For years, there had been territorial disputes between Đại Việt and Laos (Luang Pra Bang). Đại Việt was defeated in battle and bound by a treaty between the two states to relinquish control over the territory of the frontier cities to the Kingdom of Lan Sang.[16] The stipulated term of this arrangement came to end, but Laos did not return control to Đại Việt. Tư Mã Hai Đào asked the king of Đại Việt to appoint him commander-in-chief to restore the fallen state. Written legend has it that the king was won over by the charisma of Tư Mã Hai Đào, with his tall stature, long mustache, and deep eyes. Accordingly, the king appointed Tư Mã Hai Đào as his military leader after attacking him with 50 weapons at once; Tư Mã Hai Đào defended himself using only one arm!

Tư Mã Hai Đào lost the first battle of the war. However, Tư Mã Hai Đào and the Đại Việt army were eventually victorious over the Lao army. The result was the establishment of the border at Chiêng Công mountain,[17] where the current Lao-Vietnam border is located. Bronze poles were planted to mark the territorial divide. In addition, 20 border cities had to pay tribute to Đại Việt. Tư Mã Hai Đào established Mường Chu Sàn, a principality incorporating a network of small cities along the western border of the Đai Việt-Kingdom of Lan Sang. The principality included such towns as Mường Xia, Mường Mìn, Mường Cha, Mường Sại, Mường Mò and Mường Chự (now in Quan Sơn district), Mường Thống, Mường Khẳng and Mường Khiết (now in Quan Hóa district), Mường Ly, Pùng Xim (now in Mường Lát district), Mường Bén, and Mường Sôi (now in Laos) (Lê Thị Hiến 2015, 66). Tư Mã Hai Đào lived in Mường Xia (the central city of Mường Chu Sàn) as lord responsible for the protection the fontier cities and collection of tribute for Đại Việt.

Legend portrays Tư Mã Hai Đào as a hero because of his skills, exploits, and contributions to Đại Việt. Although Tư Mã Hai Đào was not ethnically Tai, he became naturalized Tai as lord of Mường Chu Sàn; he settled in one of the borderland cities where he lived until his death in

Mường Xia. After his passing, the Tai constructed at least six shrines in his honor — to his conception as a spirit of the border cities or a tutelary spirit — and he is still revered to this day. According to Tai historiography, story of Tư Mã Hai Đào as a hero and a spirit of the border cities has been told continuously for hundreds of years. He was respected and worshiped by all residents of this area:

> Everyone who passes through the lands of Chiếng Công, Xôm Sịp, and Tén Tằn have to worship Tư Mã Hai Đào. He protects the land from here to the lands of the Nùng and the Keo (Kinh). For a long time, the river has had a protecting spirit. He rides on an elephant to conquer the lands of Laos. He is protected by 20 spirits (*thén phá*). Anyone who goes to the lowlands has to worship him. Anyone who trades cattle there has to worship him, too. Anyone who passes this way has to dismount and worship. Royal soldiers passing this way have to bow their heads. If you are holding an open umbrella, you have to take it down. Hearing about him, people doff their hats as a mark of respect.

To the perception of the Tai (of both Vietnam and Laos), Tư Mã Hai Đào is not only a hero who achieved victory for Đại Việt, but also the founder of Tai polities (*ban-müang*). In addition, Tư Mã Hai Đào held the highest rank ever given to a Tai by the Vietnam court in the history of the western uplands of Thanh Hóa. There is no recorded history of Mường Xia; its people do not know who their ancestors were, nor where they came from. They perceive Mường Xia, a central city in Mường Chu Sàn constructed by Tư Mã Hai Đào, as their homeland. So Tư Mã Hai Đào is their ancestor. Recognition of Mường Chu Sàn as a principality was a landmark for them. For a long time, Tư Mã Hai Đào has been an icon for Tai people in both countries, spanning Mường Ly, Mường Lò, Mường Khiết, Mường Min, and Mường Xia on the Vietnam side, and Mường Sầm, Mường Cáng, Mường Xo, and Mường Xộp on the Laos side.

In the history of the Tai in north central Vietnam, Tư Mã Hai Đào is unique as a great lord governing a large domain. He was buried at Mount Phá Dùa. His descendants and denizens of Tai towns in Mường Chu Sàn worship him as the spirit of a Tai principality. Moreover, they recognize him as a tutelary spirit (*kwan mường;* spirit of the city). Worship continued among smaller groups of people, even during the repressive socialist period. This form of worship was called *Xên Mường* (currently *Lễ Hội Mường Xia*). Tai people performed annual ritual ceremonies for Tư Mã Hai Đào to express their gratitude to his spirit and to bring peace and prosperity to the city.

The state has promoted the practice of ancestor worship as part of its new national cultural identity since 2004. This policy of religious revival attempts to find the nation's cultural roots through the notion of "return to origins" (*về nguồn*) (Taylor 2007). On one hand, this policy promotes cultural diversity; on the other, it is a means to integrate diversity into the nation's unique identity. Such historical characters as Hồ Chí Minh (founding president of the socialist state, patriarch, and leader of the nation) and Hùng King (alleged ancestor of all ethnic groups in Vietnam) are promoted as ancestors in the national religious revival. All kinds of local ancestor worship have been integrated into national ancestor worship to unify local cults on a national level and forge a common cultural identity (Chinh 2007, 10).

The Tai in Quan Sơn have taken this opportunity to create their own history pertaining to Tư Mã Hai Đào. For example, in 2006 the communist party in Quan Sơn district published the story of Tư Mã Hai Đào in a book entitled *Lịch sử Đảng bộ huyện Quan Sơn tập I* (History of the Party of Quan Sơn District I). In 2014, an historical book called *Lịch sử các mường của người Thái ở Quan Sơn, tiếng nói, chữ viết, sách chữ Thái cổ và các văn bản chữ Thái cổ* (History of Tai cities in Quan Sơn: spoken language, written language, ancient Tai manuscripts, and old Tai texts) was written and published by Mr. Phạm Xuân Cừ, former director of Na Mèo National Park and local intellectual. It provides another rendition of the story of Tư Mã Hai Đào. In terms of folk literature (*văn học dân gian*), the story of Tư Mã Hai Đào was included in *Địa chí huyện Quan Sơn* (Geography of Quan Sơn district), published in 2016 by Huyện ủy-Hội đồng nhân dân-Ủy ban nhân dân huyện Quan Sơn — Tỉnh Thanh Hóa (District Commissioner, People's Assembly, People's Committee of Quan Sơn District, Thanh Hóa province).

*Lễ Hội Mường Xia* (Mường Xia ancestor worship or border city spirit worship) has also was reintroduced at Sơn Thủy Commune, Quan Sơn district, in 2010, following prohibition since 1957 under the socialist regime. Once again, Tư Mã Hai Đào has been reinvented as their ancestor. His shrine is near Mount Phá Dùa, where the Sơn Thủy Commune is located. It was reconstructed in 2009 as a perceived center of Mường Xia. Tai followers began to practice *Lễ Hội Mường Xia* at the shrine in 2010. The defining feature of *Lê Hội Mường Xia* is worship of Tư Mã Hai Đào. He is even mentioned in chanting for the city's spiritual pillar (*lặc mắn*). The content of these prayers resembles prayers for spirits of nature and city spirits. The five shamans in the ritual ceremony consist of three women and two men. In the liturgy, the main shaman (*người lễ chính*) is a woman called Me Một, along with her assistants (*người nữ phụ lễ*). Two men play an accompaniment of local music. Lamentably, there are currently no female *Me Một* protagonists in Sơn Thủy, so a man assumes the shaman role.

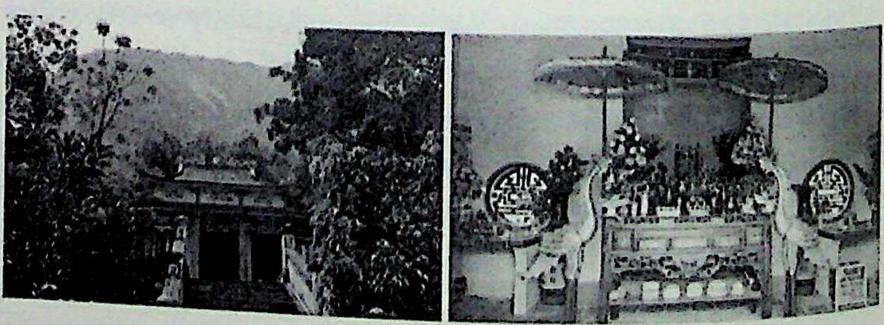


**Figure 5:** Tư Mã Hai Đào shrine at Sơn Thủy Commune, Quan Sơn District. (Photograph: Achariya Choowonglert, April 2016)

For the Tai, Tư Mã Hai Đào is both an ancestral hero and a spirit of water, fire, and earth. He is venerated in prayers for the river spirit in relation to Xia stream, which was located in the ancient homeland of Mường Chu Sàn that he constructed. Moreover, Tư Mã Hai Đào is mentioned in prayers for the spirit of water sluices. The reintroduction of *Lễ Hội Mường Xia* practices of a ritualistic and symbolic nature embodies the values of Tai living in the border cities. This reinforces people's perceptions of Tư Mã Hai Đào as their ancestor and protector of water, fire, and earth.

The significance of Tư Mã Hai Đào drives local people and authorities to search for ancient Tai manuscripts to upgrade their hero from legend to history. I stayed in Quan Sơn in October 2016 as the guest of Phạm Bá Thược, a local employee at the Department of Culture, Quan Sơn district. We discovered a Tai manuscript kept by a shaman in Mường Min Commune, close to Sơn Thủy Commune. Although this text is still untranslated (as of November 2018), an extensive tract, from page 90 onward, concerns Tư Mã Hai Đào.

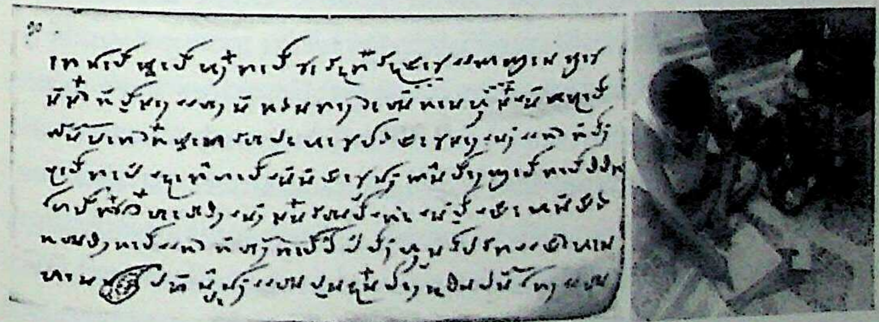


**Figure 6:** Phạm Bá Thược and the author reading a Tai manuscript about Tư Mã Hai Đào. (Photograph: Phạm Trần Thăng Long, October 2016)

I visited Phạm Xuân Cừ in October 2016 and in March 2017 and told him that I had found some stories pertaining to Tư Mã Hai Đào in Lao and Vietnam history books. In March 2017, Phạm Bá Thược, Phạm Xuân Cừ, and I went to Tén Tằn Commune, Mường Lát district, to the site of the battle between Đại Việt and the Kingdom of Lan Xang in the time of Tư Mã Hai Đào. They took some documents related to the story of Tư Mã Hai Đào to the local Mường Lát authorities while searching for further Tai manuscripts. They were searching after one outstanding manuscript, but the son of the manuscript owner was unable to locate it; when it is found, it will be a resource for further embellishments to the history of Tư Mã Hai Đào. For them, researching and rewriting the history of Tư Mã Hai Đào is part of the process of building his shrine and cultivating *Lễ Hội Xên Mường* in the Tén Tằn Commune, Mường Lát district, in order to expand Tai cultural space. In 2019, construction began on a second shrine dedicated to Tư Mã Hai Đào in Mường Lát district.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Vietnam has been committed to economic liberalization for more than three decades. However, political freedom and political movements remain subdued (Houghton-Carter 2008). There are few civic organizations in Vietnam because political power is monopolized by one single party. However, civil society and public spaces have steadily developed through the efforts of international and domestic non-government organizations and Vietnamese scholars (at home and overseas) (Kerkvliet et al. 2008). At present, cyberspace is an increasingly important forum for political participation and social movements (Yukti 2017). However, offline society, society in general (especially at a local level), direct political participation, and social movements remain fragmented. Writing history and revitalizing rituals are civil social domains that facilitate communications and expressions of identity between ethnic minorities and society in general.

This chapter makes four main points. First, the writing of history is a reproduction of memory and consciousness of the people and a space for negotiation with local power to forge identities. Accordingly, teaching and studying Tai language, including teaching history and culture to local authorities, is revitalization of culture and language and promotion of mutual understanding, as well as acceptance of differences and diversity among ethnic groups. As such, it can be seen as a process of universal Tai identity reconstruction, from the primitive to the civilized.

Second, writing history, teaching Tai language, and revitalizing the rituals of the Tai in Quan Sơn construct ethnic identity through the politics of difference and identity politics. The Tai Thanh Hóa are happy to be Vietnamese citizens, but they perceive that they are different from, but not inferior to, other Tai groups living in the Northwest Region and from the *Kinh*. They are marginalized in terms of spatial location, but in terms of culture this space is one of contestation against the dominant national ideology of *Kinh*-ization in relation to the policy of *về nguồn* (return to origins). Kymlicka (1995) suggests the notion of "polyethnic rights," by which citizenship should be accorded with differentiation of rights for ethnic minority groups; ethnic groups are different from the majority in terms of language and culture, so they cannot be integrated into the historical community of the nation.

Third, the story of Tư Mã Hai Đào, in the context of writing history and revitalizing rituals, binds Tai people with the land and nature. That is, the mystic power of Tư Mã Hai Đào is intrinsic to Tai social forces and collective consciousness. Local leaders and shamans expressed that revitalizing *lễ hội Mường Xia* is a way to preserve "spiritual culture" (*văn hóa tâm linh*). People also consider *lễ hội Mường Xia* as a vehicle to consolidate people with the supernational. It evokes a sense of attachment to the land and fosters the concept of a homeland. Thus, the *về nguồn* movement gives a sense of place (homeland) to people (Taylor 2007, 20). Furthermore, through Tư Mã Hai Đào worship, local leaders and authorities aim to unite the Tai population in the towns and cities of Mường Chu sàn. Praying to Tư Mã Hai Đào and practicing *lễ hội Mường Xia* give meaning to people's everyday lives. They provide expression for people's feelings and experiences, a forum for emotional exchange, a route for moral transmission, and an incubator for lofty aspirations (Nhung 2010, 60).

Fourth, culture cannot be seen as a collection of artefacts in folkloric form, as the government perceives. Rather, it must be considered in political context. As with language and religious revitalization, local authorities remain beyond state control. They generate their own authority, defining the meaning of land and the Tai identity. Moreover, culture is a process of turning marginalized space into a space of difference, which is not a space of resistance to the state, rather one of recognition.

## Endnote: Writing Tai History and Reviving Rituals in Thanh Hóa

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1. Presently Bá Thước District, uplands of Thanh Hóa Province.
2. Presently Quan Sơn District, uplands of Thanh Hóa Province.
3. Presently Mường Lát District, uplands of Thanh Hóa Province.
4. 12 Tai populated principalities; now in the Northwest Region of Vietnam. These principalities were considered as a semi-independent polity to *Đại Việt* (Vietnam).
5. The Vietnamese movement in the late 19th century that aimed to expel the French and restore the Vietnamese monarchy.
6. *Việt Minh* was a federal alliance for an independent Vietnam. It was founded in 1941. Its goal was to repel foreign invaders, such as France, Japan and USA, for the national independence of Vietnam (Pichet 2011: 174).
7. "The colorful culture of Vietnam ethnics," Division of Ethnic Language Television (VCTV 6), Vietnam Television Station.
8. After working in schools for many years, he became Head of the Department of Education in Bá Thước district and eventually the Deputy Head of the People's Administrative Committee of Bá Thước District (*Phó Chủ tịch huyện Bá Thước*).
9. "Report: The West (of Thanh Hóa province) on the road to reform," Division of Ethnic Language Radio, TV station of Thanh Hoa province.
10. Interview with Hà Nam Ninh, July 2015.
11. According to his surname, Hà Văn Thường can considered to be Tai.
12. "Report: The West (of Thanh Hóa province) on the road to reform," Division of Ethnic Language Radio, TV station of Thanh Hoa province.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Dialog with Phạm Xuân Cừ, from Quan Sơn district, on July 14, 2015, and with Hà Nam Ninh, from Bá Thước district, on July 14 and 15, 2015.
16. Presently the western uplands of Thanh Hóa province and Sơn La province.
17. Presently in Tén Tần Commune, Mường Lát district, Thanh Hóa provice.

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# Intangible Enclosures and Virtual Scripts: The Cultural Politics of the Tham Script in Sipsòng Panna

**ROGER CASAS**

## Introduction

Control over the form and content of written languages has long been acknowledged as a significant source of legitimacy for political and religious authority. Throughout history, literacy has been an inseparable part of politics — from the concerns of monarchs and religious leaders over establishing a canon of sacred scriptures, to the fundamental role that written languages play in the construction of contemporary "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983). The history of China is no exception. Languages and scripts have been at the center of different state projects aimed at consolidating authority and facilitating nation-building and social integration in this country. This was true for the struggles surrounding the canonical content of the Confucian classics (Chinese: *jing*); it is also the case for the simplification of Chinese characters implemented in the 1950s and 1960s under Communist Party rule (Norman 1988, 79–82).

Importantly, the script we recognize today as Chinese was not the only one in use in China at the time of the creation of the People's Republic in 1949. The territories under control of the new one-party state included a wealth of non-Chinese populations, soon to be recognized by the state as "ethnic minorities" (*shaoshu minzu*),[1] many of which possessed distinct scripts of their own. Government attitudes toward these non-Chinese scripts were determined by broader minority policy.

The Chinese state has regularly reminded observers of its commitment to the preservation and development of non-Han written languages across the country.[2] However, different political priorities and the complex cultural affiliations of the *shaoshu minzu*, many of which transcend the geographical borders of the polity, have delivered a set of confused and confusing approaches and policies in the management of multi-culturalism.

This chapter looks at the dynamics of identity politics among one minority group, the Tai Lü.[3] Their sacred script, *To Tham* or Dhamma script,[4] is still widely used in Sipsòng Panna, a small frontier prefecture (*zhou*) in southwest Yunnan Province. The Tham script links the Tai Lü of Sipsòng Panna to populations in present-day Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. These cultural trans-border connections have caused concern to different Chinese regimes throughout the contemporary period. In general, the approach of the state has been to minimize these connections and to emphasise those linking the Tai Lü to the "Chinese Nation" (*zhonghua minzu*), without openly contradicting official policy that guarantees respect for and promotion of their ethnic peculiarities (*minzu tese*). For local Tai, particularly in monastic circles, the issue has always been to preserve the link between the script and a specific understanding of Tai identity, while defending their own privileged position as caretakers of this identity due to their scriptural expertise.

## Sipsòng Panna and the cultural region of Tham script

The contemporary vicissitudes of *To Tham* can only be understood in terms of the script's relation to Sipsòng Panna, and particularly to the Tai Lü. The region designated by the Tai toponym "Sipsòng Panna" is more or less conterminous with the present-day Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture (*Xishuangbanna Daizu Zizhizhou*) in Yunnan Province, China. Until the mid-20th century, this region was a principality located in-between the Chinese and Burmese empires. This type of polity, as well as its subdivisions, are known in Tai languages as *moeng* or *müang*. The nominal head of *moeng* Sipsòng Panna, the *chao phaendin* ("lord of the land" in Tai Lü), ruled from his palace in Jinghong,[5] the present capital of the Xishuangbanna prefecture. He was also the official representative of the Chinese Empire (*tuguan*) in the area, with authority to rule over the population. The *tuguan* of Cheli, an old Chinese toponym for Jinghong, held this title until Sipsòng Panna was formally integrated into the administrative structures of the People's Republic in the early 1950s (Liew-Herres, et al. 2012, 43–44).

The language spoken by the historically dominant group in Sipsòng Panna, the Tai Lü, is closely related to other Tai languages in eastern Myanmar, northern Thailand, and northern Laos.[6] During the pre-modern period, these Tai-speaking groups dominated various *moeng* on the frontier lands between the Burmese and Chinese empires, such as Kengtung (Chiang Tung), now part of Shan State (Myanmar), and Lan Na (Chiang Mai) in present-day northern Thailand. These and other smaller *moeng* all functioned along similar socio-ecological lines. Tai-speaking groups controlled the fertile lands in the valleys, having displaced autochthonous groups (mainly speaking Mon-Khmer languages, such as Bulang, Wa, Lua and Lawa) into the hills. Tai populations maintained extensive commercial and ritual relations with the latter groups. Communities in some areas of Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos continue to use Tai Lü, in spite of the standardization of education systems and national languages. Tai Lü is still the main means of daily communication for peoples classified as Dai in Sipsòng Panna, especially in rural areas where Han[7] migrants are fewer than in towns.

The Tai Lü of Sipsòng Panna share other traditions with Tai-speaking groups in the Upper Mekong region, such as the cultivation of rice paddies in valley plains, belief in different sorts of spirits or *phi*,[8] and most importantly religious practices usually ascribed to the Theravada or southern branch of Buddhism.[9] The most common script found in Buddhist temples in Sipsòng Panna and neighboring *moeng* is *To Tham*. Details of the arrival of the Tham script in Sipsòng Panna are uncertain and controversial. According to Kang Nanshan, a Tai Lü scholar and former monk, Buddhist textual and ritual practices were introduced to the region by monks belonging to the Suan Dòk and Padaeng sects from Chiang Mai, then the capital of the confederation of states known as Lan Na, and adopted as a legitimating cult by the local ruling classes of Sipsòng Panna, during the 14th and 15th centuries, when the polity was known as Moeng Lü (Hsieh 1989, 332n11). These Padaeng and Suan Dòk monks, travelling via Kengtung, allegedly brought the Tham script to Sipsòng Panna with them. This version of events is confirmed by the fact that the script learned and used by monks in temples in Sipsòng Panna today is practically identical to the one used in monasteries in Kengtung and only stylistically different from the version found in northern Thai manuscripts.[10]

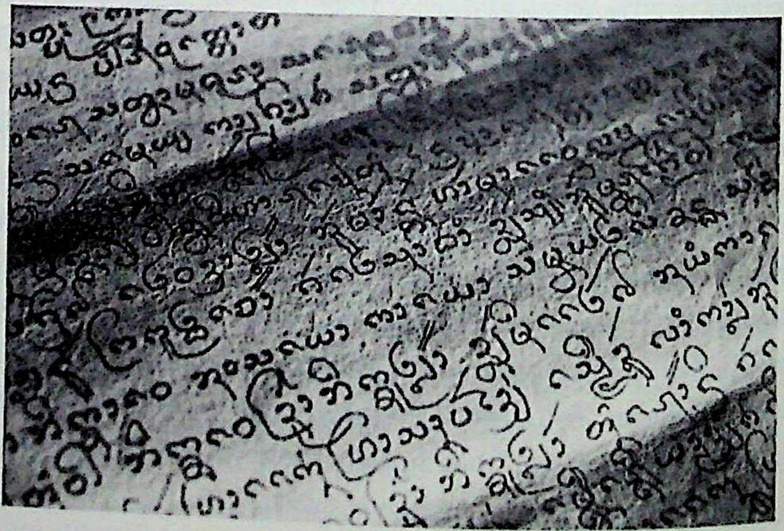


**Figure 1:** *To Tham* **manuscript from Moeng Sing, northern Laos. (Photograph: Roger Casas).**

The precise nature of the region where *To Tham* manuscripts are found, and of the connection among the different populations using the script, remain contested. The first to have looked at this area as a unified entity was William C. Dodd, a Christian missionary who proselytized in the region in the early 20th century. Dodd designated the prevalent religious tradition among Tai peoples in the Upper Mekong region as "Yuan Buddhism", because of the dominant role the Tai Yuan people took in the development and spread of the script (Dodd, 1997 [1923]).[11] Adopting this term in his work on Tai identities, Charles Keyes claimed that "from the 15th to the 19th centuries, there was an 'imagined community' (to use Ben Anderson's term) constituted by those who shared the same texts (mainly Buddhist) written in one of the variants of the Tham script" (Keyes 1995, 141).[12]

Keyes's perception of the "Dhamma Script Cultural Domain" (see the introduction of this volume) as an imagined community is questioned by Iijima as an anachronism in her own study of the problem (2009). She asserts that the area where Tham script manuscripts are found and the communities practicing Yuan Buddhism cannot be considered 'imagined' in the same sense as the contemporary national communities identified by Anderson (Iijima 2009, 26). Nevertheless, she insists that texts connect different (usually Tai-speaking) populations in this area (2009, 23–24), and suggests "cultural region of Tham script manuscripts," as an alternative label for this trans-local "interpretive community" (McDaniel 2008). Iijima agrees with McDaniel over the importance of monastic mobility and the circulation of texts in shaping this community.

The footpaths utilized by monks to traverse different *moeng* in the Upper Mekong region, and those linking northern Thailand with Sipsòng Panna through the Shan State in particular, have been identified by Kang Nanshan (Kang 2009). Nevertheless, monks were not the only travellers using these routes. Neither were manuscripts the only link between different peoples in the area. Iijima mentions other shared beliefs and practices across the region, such as the belief in *ton bun* ("holy men" in Tai languages) (Iijima

2009, 19), or the lax monastic discipline compared with the austerity of the mainstream traditions in different, self-declared Buddhist nation-states in present-day mainland Southeast Asia.[13] These and other non-Buddhist cultural markers, such as matrifocality and spoken languages, can be considered as more relevant indexes of a non-imagined community existing in the area. In any case, the question of interactions among groups in this region cannot be reduced to a matter of common texts, or scripts.[14]

In this sense, a merely textual approach tends to neglect the profoundly hierarchical nature of such interactions. Even when Iijima, who follows McDaniel on this issue, rejects the notion of the Tham script being "an exclusive feature of any particular ethnic group" and "not being limited to any linguistically defined community" (Iijima 2009, 15–16), the monastic books are fundamental to a system where Tai dominance over other groups was based on privileged access to Buddhist monastic discipline, embodied by the sacred scriptures kept in monasteries.[15] The role of the Tham script in the establishment and reproduction of symbolic hierarchies legitimating socio-economic inequalities among Tai and non-Tai peoples remains partly unexplored;[16] whatever the case, in the multicultural context of pre-modern Sipsòng Panna, *To Tham* served as a discriminating and exclusionist criterion of superior civilization, separating those peoples who could legitimately lay claim to a developed system of learning and discipline, from those who could not.

## Contemporary developments: *To Tham* and the Chinese state

Before the establishment of a firm Chinese administration and the mass arrival of Han migrants in the area, *To Tham* was synonymous with high culture and civilization in the multi-ethnic symbiotic context (Hsieh 1989, 52) of Sipsòng Panna. It is precisely these claims to legitimating or representing a particular (superior and dominant) world view that brought *To Tham* into conflict with Chinese, another writing system with potent claims to hegemony as a symbol of civilization and high culture (Dwyer 1998).

The conflict started after the incorporation of Sipsòng Panna into Chinese administrative structures during the formative period of the Chinese "geo-body".[17] In 1895, the small *moeng* was formally designated part of the Chinese Empire through agreements signed by representatives of the Empire and the British and French governments, and establishing the borders between the former, British Burma, French Indochina, and Siam.[18] At that time, knowledge of written and spoken Chinese was not widespread among the different non-Chinese populations of Sipsòng Panna. Unlike such other peripheral regions of the Chinese Empire as Lijiang, Confucian education was never prevalent in Sipsòng Panna, and at the time of the Empire's demise in 1911, only a few members of the ruling *chao* class were conversant in Chinese. When the new, post-imperial administrative division was implemented, the Nationalist government set up the first Chinese schools in the area, intended for both locals and Chinese migrants in Sipsòng Panna. Through the teaching of Chinese, "the government hoped to break the authority of the *chao* class and the influential Buddhist monks who conducted all education of Tai boys in the monasteries" (Hansen 1999, 93–94).[19]

Although the Nationalist project of establishing Chinese schools as an alternative to temple education in Sipsòng Panna failed (Hansen 1999, 95–96), the Communist Party administration from 1950 renewed efforts toward the consolidation of Chinese education in the area to integrate local non-Han populations into the Chinese polity. According to Hansen (1999, 100), the Tham script was used in public schools during the initial years of the People's Republic.[20] In spite of these early attempts, the local government soon began work to reform the script.

Within the framework of a national project to reform and standardize existing scripts and to create new ones, headed by linguist Fu Maoji, in 1952 the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (*Zhongguo Shehui*

*Kexueyuan*) sent a team to Sipsòng Panna to research and prepare the reform of the Tham script.[21] In 1953, the Second People's Congress of Xishuangbanna approved the constitution of a local Committee for the Reform of the Dai Script, composed of seven members (Hsieh 1989: 244). The task of standardizing non-Han languages at a national level required the cooperation of certain members of the "national minorities."[22] A few Tai in Sipsòng Panna who were proficient in the old script and also in Chinese, participated in this process. These included the last *chao phaendin*, the late Chao Mom Kham Lü, who acted as an advisor and assistant to Professor Fu (Hansen 1999, 100). A national-level commission ratified the reform and approved the new script in 1955 (Hsieh 1989, 244).

Several dictionaries and teaching materials in "new Tai" (*xin daiwen*) were then produced,[23] and the script became standard for official use and bilingual education among the Tai Lü. Apart from a hiatus between 1987 and 1996, when the now labelled "old Tai script" (*lao daiwen*) was reselected as the official script of the prefecture,[24] "new Tai script" has occupied that privileged position ever since.[25] At present two scripts are still utilized to transcribe the same language in Sipsòng Panna.

Political motivations may have played an important role in the creation of the new Tai script.[26] Notwithstanding, the "old script" and Buddhism as a whole survived the violence of the Maoist period. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), temples and other religious sites in Sipsòng Panna were destroyed or put to secular uses, and most monks and novices disrobed or fled to neighboring countries. The teaching and use of any Tai script, old or new, was banned during this period.[27] Changes at the top of the Chinese Communist Party between 1976 and 1978 and the re-establishment of a policy guaranteeing religious freedom brought a recovery in Buddhist practice in Sipsòng Panna; the use of both scripts and of other minority writing systems was again allowed.[28]

Nevertheless, the Tham script has remained largely limited to the temple sphere during the reform period. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were attempts to establish special classes for novices, combining Buddhist and public curricula. They were abandoned after a few years, and in general there has been little cooperation between monastic authorities and the state education system (Hansen 1999, 125–31).[29] Between 2000 and 2010, the prefectural Bureau of Education introduced a project promoting bilingual education with the technical and financial assistance of SIL International, "a global, faith-based nonprofit organization that works with local communities around the world to develop language solutions that expand possibilities for a better life."[30] The project was implemented in five selected village schools in Sipsòng Panna with majorities of Tai Lü students. It aimed to establish comprehensive Tai-language teaching from the first year of elementary school. However, the proportion of lessons taught in Tai was to be progressively reduced each year as Chinese-language classes increased. Therefore, the project belongs under the category of *transitional* bilingual education, aiming to facilitate learning of the majority language, in this case Chinese. Furthermore, teaching materials for this project were produced in the reformed Tai script, reinforcing the state-led creation of a local culture disconnected from linguistically related groups outside of China and sidelining Buddhist temples as institutions for cultural transmission. The discontinuation of the project after a few years is another example of state disinterest in implementing a coherent policy for learning and use of minority languages.[31]

The result of this state apathy is that spoken and written Tai remain practically absent from public schools, the media, and the administration in Sipsòng Panna.[32] The only bilingual education conducted in the region, and thus the only active transmission of the Tham script, is that implemented in schools located at the main monasteries. These schools were established by the Sipsòng Panna Buddhist Association to upgrade local education to national standards and to offer officially recognized degrees to monastic students. In 1995, the first school teaching Buddhist subjects as well as Chinese language classes was established at the main temple of Sipsòng Panna, Wat Pajie. In 2004, this school, known as the Buddhist Institute (*Nanzhuan Shangzuo Bu Foxueyuan* or Theravada Buddhism Institute) was granted *zhongzhuan* (secondary vocational school) status by the Yunnan provincial government. Accordingly, degrees awarded by the school became recognized nationwide.[33] The Buddhist Institute, which moved in 2008 to a new temple, Wat Long Moeng Lü, basically follows Thai models for monastic education, incorporating a curriculum based on Thai *Nak Tham*[34] and teaching materials in the Tham script. After more than twenty-five years of training local monks in the old script, the Buddhist Institute and its monks are identified by locals with traditional Tai Lü culture and its preservation.[35]

Paradoxically, the association of *To Tham* with Tai Lü tradition is acknowledged and even supported by the Chinese state, if only to emphasise the disposability of the latter. The most significant state-supported Tham script scheme in the last few decades has been the Palm-leaf Culture project (*beiyejing wenhua xiangmu*). At the core of this project lay a self-proclaimed will to preserve traditional Tai Lü culture and the simultaneous promotion of tourist development in Sipsòng Panna. The project was designed by the prefectural government of Sipsòng Panna and the provincial People's Publishing House (*Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe*) to compile, edit, and publish Buddhist and other texts traditionally recorded on palm-leaf manuscripts.[36] It was part of an official drive to "Build the Prefecture on the Culture" (*Wenhua Li Zhou*), a government initiative to use ethnic culture, Tai Lü culture in particular, to enhance Sipsòng Panna as a tourist destination and to promote overall economic development in the region (Yan 2004, 124). In this sense, another project goal was listing on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, which offers enormous economic potential through culture tourism for Sipsòng Panna (Yang 2004).[37] Two research institutes shared responsibility for the project, one in Jinghong and the other in Kunming. Initiated in the spring of 2001, the project has generated 100 volumes in a hardbound, deluxe edition, in addition to paperback editions of selected texts (usually folk vernacular stories) at more affordable prices, which can now be found in monastic quarters and government offices across the region. Published under the Chinese title *Zhongguo Beiyejing Chuanji* (Complete Works of the Palm-leaf Scriptures of China), the verso of each volume in the main series includes the original *To Tham* text, together with a standard phonetic transcription of the text and a transliteration into Chinese characters. The recto consists of a full translation of the Tai Lü text into Chinese and transliteration into the new Tai Lü script, presenting a symbolic contrast between the past (*To Tham*) and the present and future (Chinese and new Tai) of Tai culture.

Beyond merely material motivations, this project shifted the nature of the texts from sacred scriptures to secularized historical documents through textual analysis. A parallel process displaced authority from religious interpreters (Tai Lü monks) to lay experts with an allegedly formal and competent training.[38] As with Dongba Culture in Lijiang, the authority of the textual experts was endorsed by compiling and editing local texts; and experts dictated the elements of Tai Lü culture to be preserved and excluded from the representation. In this sense, such cultural preservation projects as Palm-leaf Culture are part of a general conceptual reordering and creation of "intangible enclosures" by state agents.[39]

## Contemporary developments: *To Tham* revamped?

Thanks to such endeavours as the Palm-leaf Culture project, *To Tham* appears to receive some degree of official support. At the same time, it suffers radical devaluation outside the context of the project, for instance in education and administration. Not surprisingly, most Tai Lü in Sipsòng Panna remain wary or simply unaware of this and other top-down cultural projects. Even senior monks participating in the Palm-leaf Culture project abandoned it after a short period of collaboration. The fact that most monks have little or no formal education and are therefore not qualified to carry out complex translations into Chinese was often cited as the reason. However, disagreements on the rationale behind the project and resistance by monks to the undermining of their authority might be at the root of the conflict.

These tensions notwithstanding, younger Tai Lü monks have used other means to appropriate authority emanating from Han Chinese "high culture" (Chao 1996). One example is the interest in calligraphy that developed during the last decade, especially in the main temples of Sipsòng Panna and among a few educated monks who usually have spent time in temples in inner China. Such monks write words or sayings expertly in Tai using *To Tham* characters with brush and ink on paper. While somehow elevating *To Tham* to the status of an art — calligraphy is highly valued in China and East Asia — this appropriation takes place within the symbolic parameters of Chinese "civilization", which relegate the Tham script to a mere object for aesthetic appreciation.

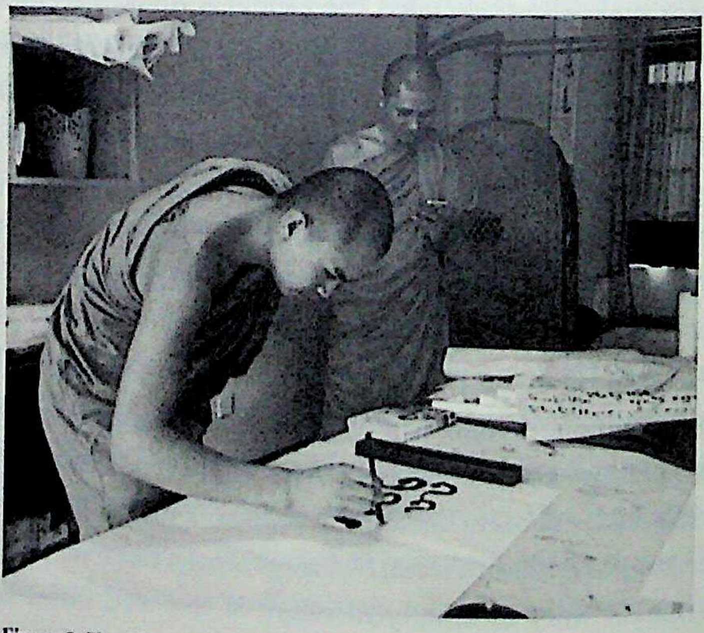
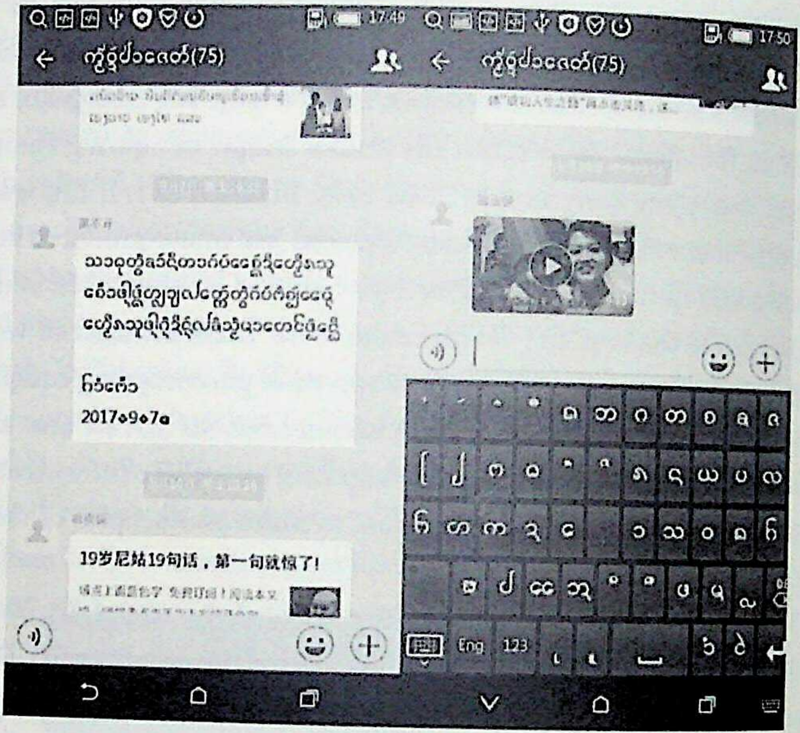


**Figure 2:** Two Tai Lü monks write calligraphy in the Tham script. (Photograph: Phra Kham Chang)

New technologies play an important role in other vernacular efforts to promote *To Tham*. A font system allowing input of Tham text was developed during the 1990s, by a group of monastics in various temples across the Upper Mekong region. This enabled the production and distribution of materials, from textbooks to prayer books, for students at monastic schools, ritual specialists, and the laity. The emergence of *To Tham* in the digital era reached the central temple of Sipsòng Panna by the late 1990s and early 2000s (Davis 2005; Borchert 2017). This was the first time that manuscripts could be replaced with mass-produced books, which could in turn be easily distributed around rural temples, and also a first step in the ongoing deterioration in *To Tham* manuscript writing skills — a decline exacerbated by the spread of photocopying equipment in Sipsòng Panna. At present, monks who need books that are unavailable in their own monasteries need only hop on a motorbike (or increasingly in a car) and drive to a nearby temple to make photocopies of the said books.

These technical developments have enabled the use of *To Tham* in audiovisual media platforms, such as video compact discs (VCDs) by Sipsòng Panna music bands. This represented a first detachment of *To Tham* from the temple sphere. Since around 2000, a few Tai Lü bands singing in the local language have offered an alternative to the pop music trends (especially Cantonese) dominant during the reform period (Wasan 2005; Davis 2003). Successfully combining local traditions with the modernity of contemporary pop-rock,[40] these bands have been immensely popular with Tai populations, including those across the border. Videos produced to accompany the songs are subtitled in *To Tham*, then shown on KTV (karaoke television), an ubiquitous entertainment outlet in contemporary China.[41] Chinese and Thai subtitles (in the latter case, with an aim to promote the music beyond China's borders) translating song lyrics were also added. The involvement of local cultural activists (see Davis 2005) in the establishment and development of this movement stems from a conscious effort to promote

*To Tham* outside monastic circles. The presence of the script on KTV has become a source of pride for young people in Sipsòng Panna, even for those unable to read and write the Tham script.



19岁尼姑19句话，第一句就惊了!

**Figure 3:** A screenshot of a Weixin chat using Unicode Tai Tham (*left*), and a Tham keyboard in an Android system. (Images: Roger Casas)

The development of a Unicode Standard support is another milestone in the recent history of *To Tham*. This allows users to write and read texts in the Tham script on such mobile platforms as smart phones. *To Tham* Unicode encoding was initiated by researchers from SIL International.[42] These specialists, then based at the Linguistics Department of Payap University in Chiang Mai, started research on the script in 2002, submitting some years later a proposal for the creation of Unicode Tai Tham, to the Unicode Consortium and ISO (International Organization for Standardization). After a few preliminary meetings with Unicode specialists and *To Tham* experts from Shan State in Myanmar and Sipsòng

Panna (including Buddhist monks), the proposal was accepted and the script encoded in 2008.

Development and maintenance of Unicode Tai Tham is a continuous, never-ending task. The scant commercial advantages that minority languages and scripts offer large corporations limits the resources invested in this project. Contributions come mostly from a handful of scholars and interested individuals working at strategic institutions and companies. Restricted resources hinder such tasks as solving problems related to incompatibility between different encoding orders for a single word, or ongoing updates to text-shaping engines and system fonts.

However, a few individuals working in "the cultural region of Tham script manuscripts" provide the project with forward momentum in the face of linguistic and technical barriers. One young monk from a border town in Sipsòng Panna raised funds for the project among local donors. Another important contributor to Unicode Tai Tham is a monk from Kengtung, in eastern Myanmar, who graduated with a BA from a monastic college in Chiang Mai and is continuing his studies in Sri Lanka. Both monks have collaborated with specialists at SIL and Unicode, including recent meetings related to the development of Unicode Tai Tham. A young layman from Sipsòng Panna has uploaded Unicode-compatible fonts and editing applications to the Apple App Store (in all other platforms they must be downloaded separately) and provides technical support.

In spite of financial and technical problems, the development of Unicode Tai Tham has been a success, and it has achieved operational status. Albeit currently used only by a small minority of monks and former monks in Sipsòng Panna to communicate through smart phones, the potential for growth is enormous in a region where social networks, Weixin in particular, are ubiquitous.[43]

## Conclusion: What next?

In parallel with the modern project of nation-building in China, a strong connection has been established between *To Tham*, the script used in the Buddhist temples of Sipsòng Panna, and a Tai Lü identity that transcends the borders of the nation-state. *To Tham* is seen as a symbol of tradition, together with Buddhism and male monasticism in contemporary Sipsòng Panna. Politicized members of the "cultural region of Tham script manuscripts" (Iijima 2009) consider it to be a fundamental marker of their identity as a people and work actively to promote the relevance of *To Tham* in the contemporary world. This attitude extends to younger members of the monastic community. Walking through the streets of Jinghong City with Tai Lü novices during past visits to Sipsòng Panna, they frequently pointed me to mistakes in shop displays and traffic signs in "new Dai script". For them, this was an indication of lack of government support for the old script, for Buddhism, and for traditional culture in general.

Can the development of Unicode Standard help the Tham script prosper in the face of government ill will and indifference? This is a difficult question. Petty quarrels among Tai groups impede the promotion and outreach of the script, regardless of acclaim for its technological advancements across the trans-national pan-Tai community in the Upper Mekong region. According to one young Sangha[44] member collaborating in the project, senior monks in Jinghong were unhappy with the decision of Kengtung participants to name the script *khün* or Tham Khün (an ethnonym for the dominant Tai-speaking group in that area of Shan State, Myanmar); they apparently felt that the designation failed to acknowledge the Tai Lü of Sipsòng Panna. Last but not least, a Unicode new Tai script (a script exclusively used in Sipsòng Panna — that is, within China) has also been operational on mobile platforms since November 2017. Although not yet widely used, its existence may serve the old purpose of neutralizing or diverting interest from *To Tham*.

In any case, the script is only one element in the Dhamma Script Cultural Domain. Its disappearance or relegation to the role of a residual cultural marker does not necessarily imply the extinction of a traditional Tai Lü identity, as feared in Sipsòng Panna monastic circles. On the other hand, if the script is to remain meaningful for local Tai, there are several issues that its self-designated custodians should consider. Most people designated as "Dai" in Sipsòng Panna as well as other groups in the region can neither use *To Tham* on a digital platform nor read the script. Following a peak in the 1990s, the number of males ordained in Sipsòng Panna has steadily decreased. Even among the ordained, knowledge of the script is hardly entrenched; after a few years in the temple, most former novices will have only superficial knowledge of the script or will forget it after disrobing because its use is not widespread outside the monasteries. To wit, not even all members or former members of the monastic community are able to read *To Tham*.

Lastly, something must be said on the subject of women. *To Tham* is taught almost exclusively in temples, and women cannot be ordained. This implies that the traditional Tai Lü identity is inherently male! Tai Lü women are not banned from learning the old script per se. I have met several women who either learned it in secular institutions that offer *To Tham* courses, as the Vocational College (*Jishu Xueyuan*) in Jinghong City, or in a temple with the help of a monk or a male elder. Some women educated in the public system learned the script during the years that *To Tham* was the official script in the prefecture (see above).

The main impediment to the survival of *To Tham* both in China and beyond is the religious monopoly of the script. There is no scholastic study of religious scriptures in Sipsòng Panna (apart from the Palm-leaf Culture project), and, more importantly, no new secular literature written in *To Tham*. Attempts by the local monastic elite to keep the script exclusively linked to Buddhism and sacred texts and thus maintain their position at the top of the cultural hierarchy as the guardians of Tai Lü culture are a significant obstacle to maintaining the relevance of

*To Tham* in an increasingly secularized society. Furthermore, as long as the script continues to be associated with institutions posing an ideological alternative to the Communist Party and the "Chinese Nation", government backing for *To Tham* is unlikely to be forthcoming. Without this support, it will be hard for the old script to remain an active link with a rich cultural tradition and a source of pride for Tai speakers in Sipsòng Panna.

# Endnote: Intangible Enclosures and Virtual Scripts

1. The term *minzu* is not a descriptive category, but a political one. It designates to the categories created by the state after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in the process of articulating an official system of ethnic classification. See Mullaney 2011.

2. The Constitution of the People's Republic specifies that the organs of self-government in areas of limited autonomy "employ the spoken and written language or languages in common use in the locality" (Article 121). According to the 1984 Law on National Regional Autonomy, such organs "shall persuade and encourage cadres of the various nationalities to learn each other's spoken and written languages" (Law on National Regional Autonomy, Article 49).

3. The Tai Lü in China are included in the official category *Dai* or *Daizu*. This category includes several Tai-speaking peoples who consider themselves different from the Tai Lü. The Tai Lü make up approximately one-third of the total population of *Daizu*. They represent more than 300,000 people, making it the most numerous of Sipsòng Panna's ethnic groups. In this chapter, *Tai* and *Lü* are used interchangeably when referring to the Sipsòng Panna context.

4. So designated by scholar Hans Penth "since it was first used primarily as a vehicle to convey the teachings of Buddhism in a form more accessible to Tai speaking peoples" (Keyes 1995, 140). Although the script is usually known by Sipsòng Panna locals simply as *to tai* (Tai script), the current convention among scholars of referring to it as *Tham*.

5. The *chao* were historically the ruling class of landowners among Tai Lü (and other Tai-speaking groups) (Hsieh 1989, 106–13). Jinghong is the Chinese name of the current capital of the Xishuangbanna prefecture. The Tai name is Chiang Hung (city of dawn).

6. In the People's Republic of China, Tai Lü language is classified within the Tai linguistic family, known in this country as *Zhuang-Dai* (*Zhuang* is an ethnonym designating another *shaoshu minzu*). The Chinese state classified most of the peoples speaking dialects within the southern branch of the Tai family as part of the *Daizu* category; many of these dialects are mutually unintelligible (Keyes 1992, 21). Although traditionally linguists tended to group the Tai-Kadai language family together with others within the Sino-Tibetan family, this opinion is considered now problematic even by Chinese specialists.

7. Han is the majority ethnic group in China, constituting more than 90% of the population, according to the 2010 census.

8. For a recent summary, see Borchert (2017, 38).

9. This perception may be distorted by the increased transnational movement of monks across the broader mainland Southeast Asia region during the past 30 years, as this movement might have enhanced homogenization of previously diverse monastic traditions in the region. Even so, many apparent differences remain, especially in terms of monastic discipline (Casas 2015). See Borchert (2017, 152–71) regarding contemporary educational mobility of Tai Lü monks. See Bizot 2000 for pre-Theravada forms of Buddhism in the region.

10. See Mong 2004: "The Yuan script was brought to Kengtung by the Yuan people of Lan Na in the 13th century when they moved into that area . . . The Hkun [Khün] area of Kengtung was culturally, racially [*sic*] and politically under the influence of Lan Na until the mid-16th century. The Hkun script . . . is still very much a Yuan script" (171–72); see also Mangrai 2002: "Within the five above-mentioned states where Khün script was in general use [Kengtung, Moeng Laem, Sipsòng Panna, Laos, and Chiang Mai], there seems to be little doubt that their culture and the Sasana [Buddhist doctrine] came from Chiang Mai, in the south, as recorded in the *Padaeng* chronicle" (3–4). Incidentally, this script was (and still is) also used by the Blang (*Bulangzu*, *Bulang*), a Mon-Khmer-speaking group related to the Lawa or Lua of northern Thailand and inhabiting the highlands of western Sipsòng Panna.

11. Tai *Yuan* is one of the ethnonyms used by the Tai-speaking populations of northern Thailand as self-designation. Another common self-designation is *khon moeng* ("people of the *moeng*").

12. In the same paper, Keyes had previously stated that "a literature that is written with the same orthographic system can serve as the basis for people to imagine themselves as part of the same community" (1995, 139–40).

13. Iijima 2009, 20; for cross-border Khruba movements in the Upper Mekong region, see the recent compilation edited by Paul Cohen (2017). For divergences in monastic discipline, see Casas 2015. For labor among monastics, see Borchert 2011.

14. In spite of these disagreements with Iijima's views, hers is the most thorough study of the broader cultural ramifications of the Tham script.

15. Andrew Turton: "Tai may use the lack of knowledge of (Buddhist) morality and teaching (Kham Müang = *bo hu sin, bo hu Tham*) as the (negative) mark of the non-Tai . . ." Accordingly, in the context of the Upper Mekong region "the internal histories and traditions of non-Tai peoples are virtually unanimous in their self-deprecation or self-commiseration for their lack of, or loss of a written script" (Turton 2000, 27). Significantly, non-Tai populations in the *moeng* were traditionally referred to by the Tai as *kha* ("serfs").

16. Some Mon-Khmer peoples were allowed by the Tai to learn their script and language to serve as "mediators between Dai rulers and the subject hill tribes" (Hsieh 1989, 55). In spite of their relatively privileged position, the Bulang of Sipsòng Panna remained symbolically subordinated to the Tai. Even today, many Bulang people understand and speak Tai Lü language. On the other hand, Hsieh is using Chinese research produced as part of the state "minority identification" (*minzu shibie*) project, carried out in the 1950s. These sources stress "liberation" by the Communist Party, often exaggerating the discriminating and even exploitative character of previous socioeconomic relations among groups in the area.

17. The concept of 'geo-body' was firstly used by Tongchai Winichakul and applied to the case of Thailand in his *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation* (Univ. of Hawaii Pr., Honolulu, 1994).

18. Liew-Herres et al. 2012, 6; Keyes 1992, 11–12; see also Tongchai, *Siam Mapped*.

19. He Shukun, first chief of government in Sipsòng Panna during the Republican period, wrote in 1913: "The barbarians . . . cannot follow the old custom of sending children to the temples to be monks and to learn Burmese books only. If they don't know the Han language, they will face much difficulty in their work" (quoted in Hsieh 1989, 157–58).

20. A few village schools experimented with teaching one class of Tai students in Chinese only and teaching basic Tai in another, before turning to the study of Chinese (Hansen 1999, 99). On the other hand, some of the teaching materials from that period were used when the new script was abandoned in favor of the old one in the late 1980s (see below).

21. For the role of Fu Maoji in this project at a national level, see Guldin 1994. The main phase of the project took place in the mid-1950s (Guldin 1994, 133). The process began earlier in Sipsòng Panna, probably due to the existence of a script with a long tradition among the Tai Lü. Scripts for some of the *minzu* were created *ex nihilo*.

22. As a result, "some ethnologists felt that their work had indeed helped include the minorities in the Liberation [*sic*]" (Guldin 1994, 134).

23. Publication of the *Banna Newspaper* (using the new script) started in 1957, and was suspended from 1966 to 1972 (Hansen 1999, 100). *Banna* is an abbreviation of *Xishuangbanna*, and currently a popular form to refer to Sipsòng Panna, even among local Tai Lü.

24. Hansen (1999, 100, 126); see also Hsieh (1989, 244): "In 1987, after the new writing system had been used for 32 years, the People's Congress of Xishuangbanna passed a resolution to decide to resume the old style of Dai character [*sic*]. Apparently, this was so because of the support for the old script on the part of the last *chao phaendin*." Hsieh interpreted this as a symbol of "a resurgence of traditional Dai identity" (1989, 244–45, 247). After a visit in the early 1990s, Keyes commented that the new script was not popular among the Tai Lü in Sipsòng Panna (1995, 142). However, at present local attitudes seem to be mixed. For a more detailed account, see Hansen (1999, 100) and Cobbey 2007.

25. Excluding periods when use of minority languages and scripts was banned, for instance, during the Cultural Revolution; see Hansen 1999, 106.

26. See Hansen 1999. See Keyes (1992, 26) on Buddhist monasteries in Sipsòng Panna as a source of "significant passive resistance" to the Chinese state; and Hsieh (1989, 247) on the importance of the old script as a marker of traditional Tai Lü identity.

27. See Hsieh 1989, 227–28.

28. See Hsieh 1989 and Peters 1990. For a vivid personal account of the recovery of novice ordination, see Kang 2009.

29. An exception is the recent recognition by the state of the Buddhist courses at the main temple-schools in Sipsòng Panna, Wat Pajie, and Wat Long Moeng Lü.

30. https://www.sil.org/about (accessed August 31, 2021). For an introduction to this project in its early stages, see Cobbey 2007.

31. "Teachers, school administrators and members of the Bureau of Education in the three counties and the prefecture [are] roughly divided between a majority who saw the teaching of Tai as a temporary necessity, and a minority who wanted expansion and improvement of Tai language instruction in primary schools, in examination, and in secondary education" (Hansen 1999, 129). Due in part to such disagreements, experiments in bilingual education that started in the 1980s were abandoned in the 1990s (1999, 127). Government officials who see no need to expand teaching of local languages in public schools argue that such languages hinder proficiency in Chinese, the only language of social mobility in contemporary Sipsòng Panna. This view is closely related to considerations of Chinese as the language of science and modernity and as a superior means of communication. The converse implication is that minority cultures and languages are backward (Dwyer 1998). From the early 1980s to the present, the economic development of Sipsòng Panna has attracted large numbers of migrants from populated areas in the interior of the country. Chinese has thus become the main language in the educational system, the administration, and trade. The possibilities offered by law for the offspring of ethnic minorities to be educated in their own languages are determined by what Walker Connor called the "voluntary principle". Faced with the choice of sending their boys to the temple for an education in Tai Lü or to a Chinese school, parents will normally opt for the latter. A few favor the introduction of Tai in public schools; much fewer of *To Tham*. In relation to the situation in the Soviet Union, ". . . parents desirous of eliminating any barriers to the upward mobility of their children would be apt to select the school that assured their offspring the best grounding in the country's language of success, that is to say, the language of access to the higher echelons of the party, industry, and government" (Connor 1984, 257). The revival of *To Tham* at an official level between 1987 and 1996 created more confusion and highlighted internal divisions in the government regarding education in Tai and the inconsistency of local educational policies.

32. "As a matter of fact, neither the traditional style [*sic*] nor the new style [*sic*] had much use in Sipsòng Panna after liberation [*sic*]" (Hsieh 1989, 245).

33. This status is contingent on the teaching of national curriculum subjects by professional teaching staff of the Jinghong Technical School (*Jishu Xueyuan*; formerly *Shifan Xueyuan* or Normal School).

34. See Borchert (2017, 143–44) and Kang Nanshan 2009. For a detailed account of education at Wat Pajie and the different curricula taught at the temple in the early 2000s, see Borchert (2017, 127–51); see also Hansen (1999, 114–15), and Davis (2003, 180, 192).

35. Since 2004, after completing this hybrid religious and secular curriculum, graduates can pursue further studies at the provincial Buddhist Institute near Kunming (*Yunnan Foxueyuan*), providing students access to a tertiary vocational education (*dazhuan*) diploma. Tai Lü monks can also follow further education in Buddhist schools in China, Thailand, Singapore, and Sri Lanka — none of which use *To Tham*. See Casas 2015 and Borchert (2017, 152–71).

36. Many texts are recorded on books made of mulberry bark (Tai Lü: *kadat sa*).

37. Tai Lü culture had been associated with the tourist industry since the 1980s (see Hsieh 1989), but the potential of this tradition for promoting local tourist industry, which was criticized for lack of cultural content (Zhu 2004, 113–14), remained untapped until the success of the Dongba Culture project in Lijiang (see Chao 1996, 217).

38. Scientific expertise is the ultimate criterion for establishing *To Tham* as a valuable relic of the past and legitimating the authority of the new sociopolitical structures in Sipsòng Panna. One Han researcher (and Communist Party cadre) involved in the project explicitly stated that Palm-leaf Culture is "one thing left in history" that in the unavoidable process of economic development will conflict with the "requirements of the new times and market economy" (Li 2004, 71). It is the duty of the state and the Communist Party to "promote the modern transformation of the culture into a socialist new culture of the Dai people that can be a strong support to modern economy" (72). For a discussion on how "the sacred physical and devotional aspects of textuality were . . . diminished and altered with the transition to print culture" in Buddhist Cambodia in the 1920s, see Hansen 2007, 83.

39. This notion derives from Roderick Neumann's notion of "nature conservation enclosures" (Neumann 2004). The "reordering of society in space" involves the creation and manipulation of dichotomies, categories, and concepts. "The clarifying of boundaries and the removing of ambiguities" are part of "the process of mapping, bounding, containing, and controlling nature and citizenry [that] make a state" (Neumann 2004, 202). In the case of *cultural* preservation projects, reordering takes place in an abstract or ideal space (hence the term "intangible enclosures").

40. The most popular musician and arguably the catalyst of the movement was a former novice who utilized his literary knowledge of the Tham scriptures in his compositions. See Wasan 2005 and Davis 2005 on the connections of music bands to Wat Pajie, the main temple in Jinghong and seat of the head of the local monastic community. See Amporn 2010 and Ferguson (2008, 2012) for the development and significance of a contemporary music movement among the Shan (Tai Yai) of Myanmar, which became a model for Sipsòng Panna bands.

41. For KTV in China, see Boretz 2009 and Osburg 2013.

42. I thank Martin Hosken, Liang Hai and Tu Khamchang for their kind help in completing this section of the paper.

43. As its predecessor QQ a product of Shenzhen-based company Tencent, Weixin (English: WeChat) is a text and voice messaging service, capable of recording and supporting video devices. In March 2018, Weixin reached a billion users worldwide (see https://technode.com/2018/03/05/wechat-1-billion-users/, accessed May 21, 2021).

44. *Sangha* is the term commonly used in the global Buddhist world to designate the communities living in monasteries and sustained by the laity.

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# MANUSCRIPT CULTURES AND EPIGRAPHY OF THE TAI WORLD

## Edited by Volker Grabowsky

During the past four decades an impressive corpus of manuscripts and epigraphical material in Thailand, Laos, and adjacent Tai-speaking areas has been surveyed, documented, and digitized. Though manuscripts (written on palm-leaf, various forms of paper, cloth, bamboo, and other organic material) and inscriptions (on stone, metal, wood, etc.) may be considered "things of the past" in a modern world dominated by book printing and digital technologies, they continue to be produced in Thailand, Laos, and many adjacent Tai-speaking areas. Scholarly interest in these objects encompasses philological and historical studies of the texts themselves, as well as study of the material aspects that designate these materials as culturally significant. This collection explores the production, use, and transmission of manuscripts both as containers of traditional knowledge and as objects used in daily life. Special attention is paid to the significant influence manuscripts and inscriptions have had on each other, and to the relationship between modernity and the traditional manuscript cultures of the Tai world. The collection also addresses the preservation and storage of manuscripts, particularly in different kinds of repositories, ranging from diverse local catalogs to extensive international collections in the West. Finally, the book includes accounts by natural scientists of their work to determine the origin of writing materials and substances used to create manuscripts, to date manuscripts and inscriptions of the past, to reconstruct different script layers, among other topics.

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